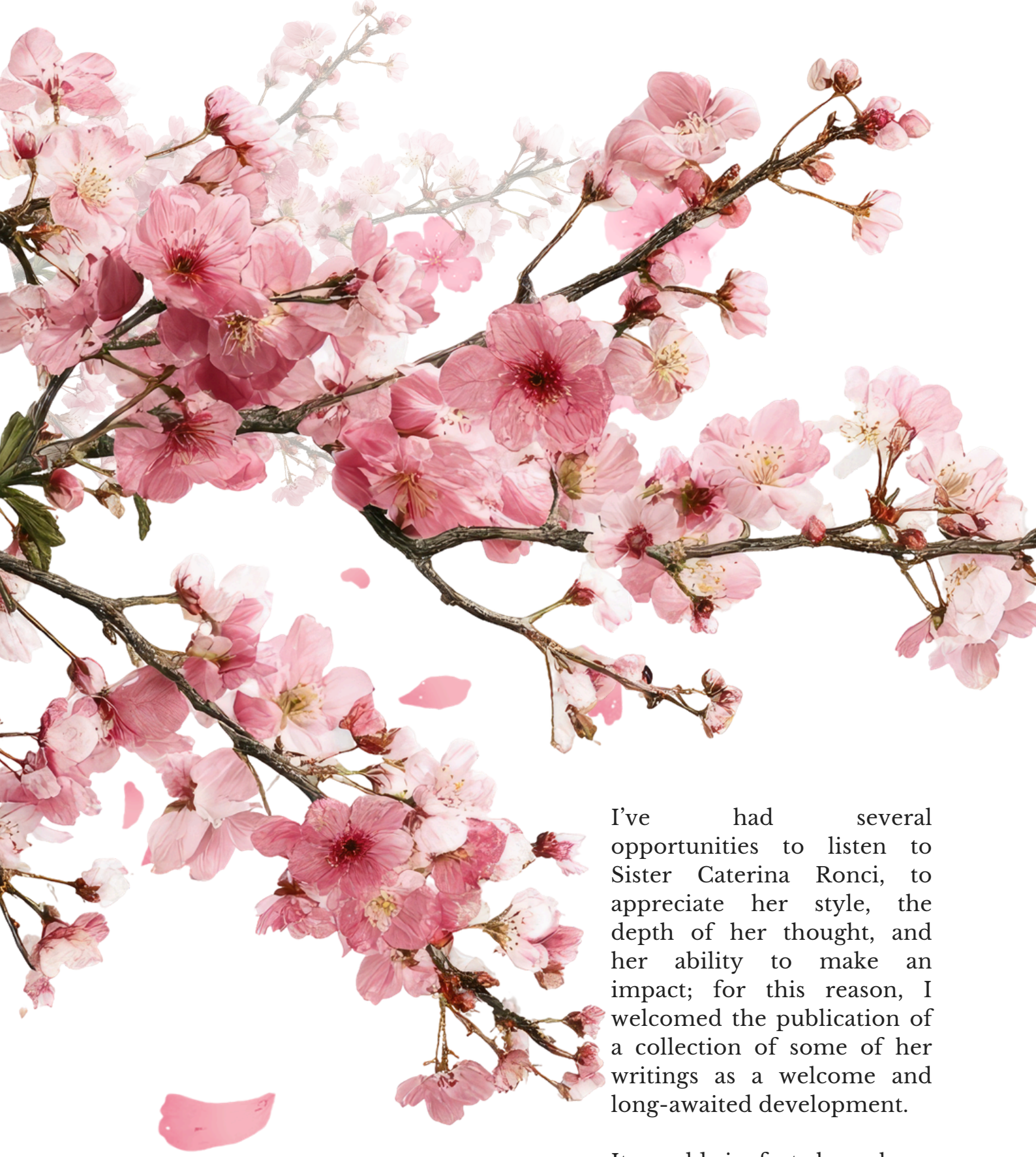

LET'S TALK
ABOUT IT
CATERINA
RONCIASC



I've had several opportunities to listen to Sister Caterina Ronci, to appreciate her style, the depth of her thought, and her ability to make an impact; for this reason, I welcomed the publication of a collection of some of her writings as a welcome and long-awaited development.

It would, in fact, have been reductive to limit access to such nourishment to a select few, when it can instead be offered, on a permanent basis, to a wider audience.

Presentation



"Gather up the leftovers, so that nothing is lost." This comparison comes naturally to me. The leftovers Jesus referred to were not scraps or crumbs for little dogs, but baskets overflowing with the good bread of timely and abundant providence. They were gathered—as the four Evangelists unanimously report—twelve full baskets of what remained of the loaves and fishes miraculously multiplied by Jesus, after he had satisfied the hunger of a multitude of people.

Food to be shared with those who had not been present at the first distribution, or to be savored again—to better internalize it—by those who, still filled with wonder at the event of grace they had witnessed with their own eyes, had already tasted it.

Baskets overflowing with fresh bread. I see a chorus of the accounts published in this text.

The material presented is organized into eight sections, consisting of contributions requested from Sister Caterina on various occasions to explore the spirituality of Redemption in greater depth: reflections on specific themes, commentaries on key texts in the literature of the Adorers, reports for distant listeners, and articles for the provincial Newsletter...

These writings are characterized by brevity, as required by the purpose for which they were written. Concise and essential, they are meant to be read not as a narrative, but as a text for study, meditation, and formation. And also for delight, for those who love to savor words expressed with a sense of beauty.



Maria De Mattias is a protagonist in most of the writings.

The author comments on some of her letters during this “radiant and special Advent season for the Congregation”—as a tribute to her holiness, officially recognized by the Church—highlighting her passion and prophetic vision, her mystical stature, and her missionary zeal. She focuses on presenting the Canticle to the Blood of Christ, All Nations, Clap Your Hands, as Maria De Mattias’s poem, in which the first Adorers celebrates God’s mercy in an outpouring of gratitude and joy. She offers insights into her prayer, such as “a longing for the Lord to fill one’s entire life, always.” Finally, she describes her holiness as the seeking and welcoming of God, as “faithfulness to His Will—desired, sought in prayer, and gradually realized in the cross and in the power of the Blood of Jesus.”

From the holiness of Maria of Vallecorsa to that of the Adorers—“a masterpiece built by God’s faithfulness upon our poverty”—to that of all Christians universally called to this wonderful destiny.

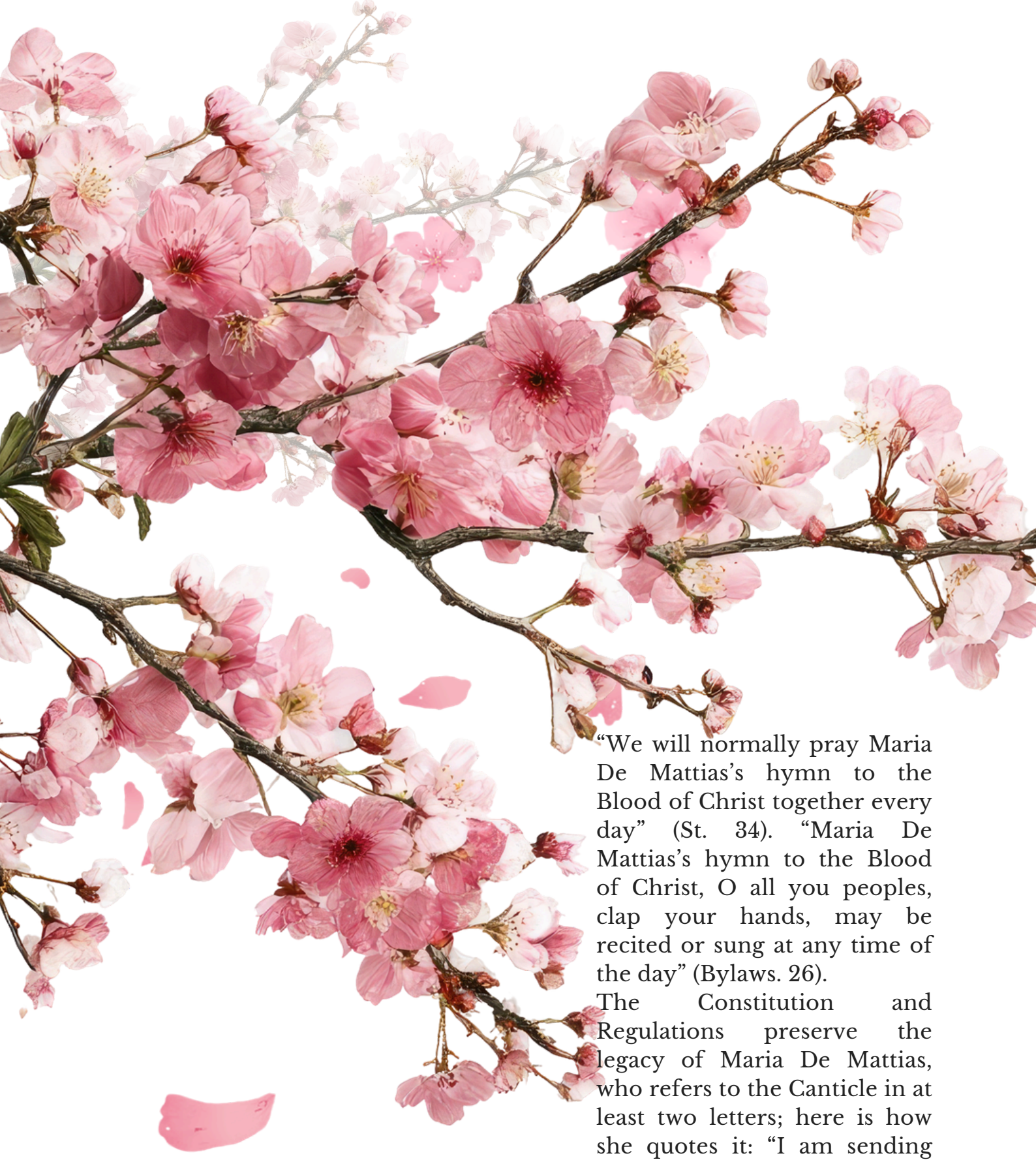
And with the calm flight of a bird, these reflections lead us to consider the mission of the Adorers, the specific spirituality of their governance, communion, fidelity, and service, and they highlight—with appropriate commentary—certain articles of their Rule of Life.

One theme, above all others, runs through the pages of this collection, like the thread that holds the pearls of a necklace together. A common thread: the Mystery—whether explicit or implied—of the Blood of Christ. A Mystery that Sister Caterina contemplates with the eyes and heart of an expert and a lover, with the wisdom that springs from reflection and life, even before it springs from culture. A Mystery that polarizes and unifies existence, makes it sing with exultation, spreads its own faith, and anticipates the fruits of hope.

It is significant that this collection is being published in the year that officially recognizes the sanctity of Maria De Mattias, an event in which “our hearts are warmed, our most beautiful and daring hopes reemerge, and our plans multiply.”

The publication of these pages confirms this last statement by Sister Caterina and transforms it into a blessing for all who will read them.

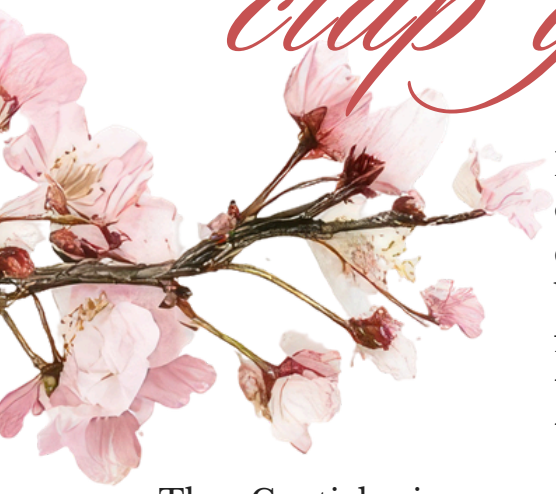
Angela Di Spirito, asc



“We will normally pray Maria De Mattias’s hymn to the Blood of Christ together every day” (St. 34). “Maria De Mattias’s hymn to the Blood of Christ, O all you peoples, clap your hands, may be recited or sung at any time of the day” (Bylaws. 26).

The Constitution and Regulations preserve the legacy of Maria De Mattias, who refers to the Canticle in at least two letters; here is how she quotes it: “I am sending you our Canticle,” she writes to Sister M. Clementina Consalvi. “Here is the Canticle she desires.” And the text is attached to the letter (Letter 5/30/1863[1]).

O all you peoples, clap your hands...



I emphasize the name: Canticle and the adjective our, which convey: the festive, choral style of the composition—best expressed in song—and its belonging to our ASC congregation. In fact, it is not found in the tradition of either the Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood or the Archconfraternity of the Most Precious Blood.

The Canticle is an anthology of biblical verses, a poly-psalm, which synthesizes and celebrates our spirituality:

the contemplation of the Father's work in the Son,
redemption through the blood of Jesus,
with a heart open to cosmic dimensions.

I have always liked to compare the Canticle to the Magnificat, calling it our Magnificat, which—prayed daily by all the Adorers—envelops the world in an embrace of joy, gratitude, and hope.

As a narrative of Redemption, the Canticle unfolds around several fundamental and compelling biblical-theological themes that sprang from the ardent heart of Maria De Mattias, first and foremost: God's mercy.

[1] Below is an explanation of the abbreviations used in the text, for readers who are not "insiders" and are unfamiliar with them; AG = General Assembly; ASC = Adorers of the Blood of Christ; Canticle = Psalm-like composition by MDM; CdV —Life Charter, Constitution of the ASC; Lett. = Maria De Mattias's Correspondence, 1944 edition; MDM = Maria De Mattias; St = Statutes; VC = Consecrated Life; VN = Voci nostre, the ASC Roman Province's internal newsletter; Obviously, we do not consider it necessary to explain the biblical abbreviations, as they are universally used.



If careless use erodes the true meaning of words and presents them in a diminished and altered form, this divine reality is habitually subject to a sad reversal.

Thus, mercy—which is the very nature of God—is reduced to compassion, or rather to pity, to the attitude of the powerful who humiliate the poor. This does not befit our God of Mercy; it is not what Scripture teaches us.
The absence of a longing for God, even in our own day, is perhaps the result of this negative message.

Our God of Mercy is the Creator who calls us to life to "pour out his love" (Lit.).

He relates to us with personal attention, with tender, heartfelt care: "I carried you as a man father carries his son" (Deut. 1:31). "I am the Lord your God, who holds you by the right hand" (Is. 41:13). "Can a mother forget her child? Even if she did, I will never forget you. "See, I have carved you on the palms of my hands" (Isaiah 49:15–17). "You belong to me… You are precious in my eyes; you are honored, and I love you" (Isaiah 43:1–4).

God-Mercy, moreover, always surpasses all our expectations through the acts of his love toward us. The ultimate example: the incredible reality of Jesus!

When, as we listen to the Word and discern history, we allow the Spirit to reveal to us at least a little of God's true face, our lives are renewed, and we become heralds of good news—news that kindles desire, gives rise to a longing, and leads us to cry out with the psalmist:

"My soul thirsts for God:
when shall I come and see the face of God?" (Is 42:3).

We are in the Canticle, in which the Foundress, while borrowing literal expressions from Scripture, expresses her knowledge of God and bursts forth with the invitation and the opening affirmation:

"O all you peoples, clap your hands,
acclaim the Lord with voices of joy
and gladness,
for the Lord, exalted and great,
has shown us his mercy."

Mary refers above all to the mercy that brought forth the Savior, the culmination of a reality with ancient roots, of which "the earth is full" (PS 33:5) and which permeates history:

"Praise the Lord, for he is good:
for his mercy endures forever...
He alone has worked wonders:
for his mercy endures forever...
He delivered Israel from Egypt:
for his mercy endures forever...
He led his people through the wilderness:
for his mercy endures forever...
He provides food for every living thing:
for his mercy endures forever...
Praise the God of heaven:
for his mercy endures forever" (PS 136).

The Canticle of Maria De Mattias speaks above all of God's mercy in Jesus, who, by becoming incarnate, made that mercy visible, expressed it through his actions, attitudes, and words, and sealed it with his blood.

The central part of the composition, with the intensity of the Pauline hymns, thus summarizes the entire history of salvation:

the magnificence of creation,
the disorder of sin,
the bitterness of God's wrath,
the remedy: Jesus.

God's world is marked by harmony, goodness, beauty, trust, and cooperation...

"God saw all that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen 3:4–5). And when God came down to "walk in the garden," Adam and Eve hid themselves (Gen 3:8). They had traded their Creator for an apple whose bitterness still fills their mouths and all of history.

This is our sin.
For God, it is a disappointment of love. He, the lover, finds Himself rejected, prevented from expressing Himself as mercy because of the barriers erected precisely by sin.

This is the wrath of God.

It is not anger, resentment, or a desire for vengeance, but rather pain, sadness, a longing for love, and, therefore, a determination to court the beloved in order to win him or her back. “The offspring of the woman will crush your head” (Gen 3:15), our God immediately assures us as He curses the serpent.

And His purpose gradually strengthens and becomes clearer: “I am doing a new thing… and the people I have formed for Myself will sing My praise” (Is 19:21). “I will sprinkle clean water on you… I will purify you; I will give you a new heart, and I will remove the heart of stone from within you and give you a heart of flesh” (Ez 36:25–26); even though “my people are slow to turn… how could I abandon them, hand them over to others? My heart is moved within me; my innermost being is troubled… Yet I will not turn away in my anger” The new beginning, the remedy, is Jesus! He alone is able to bring a smile back to the Father’s face, because He alone knows the Father’s pain and hope. And He assures us:

“Behold, I am coming. In the scroll of the book it is written of me that I do your will. This I desire…” (Ps 40:7–9). The Father is the director; Jesus is the conscious and courageous protagonist of this plan of redemption.

Maria De Mattias, in the Canticle, leads us through this exodus from the fall to salvation:

“For He did not spare His own Son,
but sacrificed Him for all of us,
in order to redeem us and free us
from our sins through His Blood;
and thus, justified by His Blood,
He might save us from wrath through Him.
And we who were far off might be brought near
by virtue of the Blood of His Son.”

The Blood of Jesus restores within us the image of the Father, washing away the sin that defiles it. Sin kills Jesus:

“He was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brings us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Is 53:5). St. Paul comments: “You were bought at a price” (1 Cor 6:20).

This is Redemption.

All of Maria De Mattias's writings offer invaluable glimpses into this reality of love and blood. She is so captivated by the crucified Jesus that she would like to "run to call all souls to love Jesus" (Letter 111). Jesus is "beautiful," He is "good," and, as Maria writes, "I pity Him because He is loved by so few" (July 29, 1855). And in the Canticle, with this awareness, she invites us:

"Sing hymns to Jesus, all you who are His saints,
and celebrate the memory of His holiness,
for He loved us and washed us in His blood
and became our help and our Redeemer."

And to each of us, Adorers of the Divine Blood, Maria writes, revealing to us the secret of her "wounded" heart: "I often try to withdraw into solitude to be inflamed with the most ardent love for Jesus. I love Him so much, but I will not be satisfied unless I die of love for Him who died for me" (Letter, May 21, 1850).

In our life of relationship with the Lord, we may find ourselves—more or less consciously—merely spectators.

"The people stood by watching" (Lk 23:35); the evangelist notes this when speaking of the most dramatic moment of Jesus' Passion: the crucifixion.

Faith is the opposite. We can speak of a life of faith only in terms of involvement, because to believe is to adhere to Jesus with our whole being:

"Jesus in our heart, Jesus in our mind, Jesus in our soul, Jesus on our tongue, Jesus in our work." (Letter June 18, 1860).

Faith is the moment when the Good News touches you deeply, bringing you joy or sorrow, filling your life, transforming it, and drawing you into the Lord, who finally rejoices over you—because He can wash you clean with His Blood, save you with His love, and bring you into the New Life, the life of the redeemed.

The hymn Popoli tutti enriches and enlightens us on this theme as well: us and the gift of salvation.

It is through faith that we come to know the Father's mercy and His revelation in Jesus; in this knowledge we gradually build our theological life: "In contemplating the love and condescension of Jesus... the soul is drawn to the attributes of God, and especially to His immense goodness; the intellect ponders these things it cannot comprehend; the heart is carried

away, expanding within that Being of goodness and love, which, if it did not have such an outlet, would burst with the desire to love Him and to see Him loved" (Letter no. 641, undated).

This is when the most characteristic sentiments of the believer in Jesus arise —sentiments that are stable, unshakable, and contagious:

gratitude toward God,
good relationships with others,
respect for creation,
a missionary zeal...
and the need, as in every love, to reciprocate, to not come empty-handed...

"O Lord, my God, what shall I give you
in return for all the blessings you have bestowed upon me?"

Maria attempts an answer by expressing the desires that crowd her heart:

she would like to love Jesus very, very much,
she would like to run and call everyone to love Jesus,
she would like to take pride in suffering for Jesus, in bearing with glory the humiliations and contempt for Jesus,
she would like to die for the Blood of Jesus, wherever He wills, however He wills, and whenever He wills...

She also invites us, the rest of us: "Jesus loves us without any merit on our part; let us love him deeply because he is worthy of being loved. Let us love him also for the great good of Redemption, for the blood he chose to shed out of love for us. May our hearts always be filled with love for Jesus, happy to die for Jesus... This is our entire hope" (Letter, March 13, 1857).

None of our responses is adequate to God's gift. Maria senses this, and in the Canticle she shares with us the attitude of faith that is most beautiful in its simplicity—the one that brings the greatest joy to God's heart:

I will take the cup of salvation…

I will accept the gift—that is, I will allow myself to be saved; I will let Him, who has always loved me, see His waiting consoled.

The adventure of faith—forgive me the comparison—makes us all like Cinderella, loved and sought after by Prince Charming... Without false humility and with the spirit of a bride, we can live—by faith—the most compelling and exhilarating love story.

The Bible tells the story of Esther: "…an orphan, having lost both her father and mother, she was brought to King Ahasuerus in the palace. The king loved Esther more than all other women… He placed the royal crown on her head and made her queen" (Esther 2).

The Bible also tells the story of Mary of Nazareth, who sings:

"The Lord has looked upon the humility of his servant...
the Almighty has done great things for me...
All generations will call me blessed!" (Luke 1).

The Song of Songs continues:

"And I will invoke the power of this blood."

We call upon the one we love, the person in whom we believe. Mary and we invoke the Blood because we believe in Jesus, who gave it to us, because it is our entire hope.

Just as, humanly speaking, the name "Mom" or "Dad" wells up from deep within and becomes a spontaneous and most tender voice, so too, in faith, we bring forth what is most dear to us and sustains us: the Blood of Jesus the Redeemer.

This is how Maria De Mattias urges us: "May the praise of the Blood of Jesus resound everywhere; my daughter, let us listen to the voices of that adorable Blood shed with so much pain and so much love" (Letter 29.3.1856).

Therefore:

"I do not pray to be rich,
nor to be showered with honor.
I do not pray to possess happiness,
nor the charm of poetry.
I pray only that throughout my life
I may possess Love.
May I always
rejoice in your love" (M. Hertsens)

With the historic birth of Jesus, a long wait comes to an end, and Simeon affirms this in his blessing:

"…my eyes have seen your salvation" (Lk 2:30).

Generation after generation had cried out: “If only you would rend the heavens and come down! Where are the stirrings of your tenderness and your mercy? You, Lord, you are our Father; you have always been called our Redeemer” (Is 63).

In response to this heartfelt anguish, here is God’s prayer-promise, born of suffering:

“Comfort, comfort my people,
speak tenderly to the heart of Jerusalem
and proclaim to her that her captivity is over...” (Is 40:1–2).

In the fullness of time, Jesus came, and in his Blood he embodied and made visible the Father’s mercy and tenderness toward us.

The Foundress, who previously recounted this great event, now sings:

“Blessed throughout the ages is the Blood of Christ
which has done wondrous things for us.
Blessed be Jesus forever...”

Salvation is celebrated, and the blessing is its sign, its measure, its expression: “When I have saved you, you will become a blessing” (Zech. 9:13). But salvation is also a commitment—the one Jesus entrusted to his disciples when he sent them out into the whole world.

Maria De Mattias speaks of “Jesus’ great condescension in calling us to help” in order to “invite people to share in the fruits of redemption.” She says she is ready “to give even her life so that all may know the love of the Cross.” Indeed, “how can they know the Lord without hearing about him? And how can they hear about him without someone proclaiming him?” (Rom 11:14). This is the meaning of the second waiting: the time granted by God’s providential goodness so that those who already taste his consolation may share it with those who have not yet heard of it.

It is the time of the new prophets and the new forerunners! It is the eschatological waiting—no longer anguished, no longer dark... Jesus, through his Blood, has kindled and sustains the hope of “a new heaven and a new earth.” The work he began is certain, progressive, and unceasing.

The Lord says: “In the days to come you will understand this” (Jer 30:24). We await the “end of days,” and this second waiting is a longing for fulfillment, an eagerness for contemplation, a joyful concern to bring everyone and all of creation into it.

In God's world, restored to the "beautiful order of things" by the Blood of Jesus, in the kingdom that the Son will return to the Father, resplendent as it was in the beginning!

Maria De Mattias concludes her Canticle with this certainty, summed up in a prayer and in the powerful image of a world flooded with the Blood that recreates:

> "May heaven and earth be filled with the glory of the Blood of Christ!"

Yes, it is certain: the Blood of Jesus "like a life-giving spring—indeed, a river—accessible to all, flows and spreads out for the sake of all the children of Adam" (MDM).

It is the rainbow set in the sky (Gen 9) that spans all of history and the entire universe, reconnecting the end with the beginning, fulfilling every word of the Father, and rendering Him His joy and glory.

The Song of Songs, too, is a wondrous parable, an experience of faith and wisdom, and, at the same time, inspiration and guidance for every life that opens itself with love to the mystery of Jesus the Lord.



1. Adoration: The Biblical Meaning of the Term.

I have been invited to contribute to the provincial Newsletter again this year. The goal remains to deepen our ASC spirituality through the writings of Maria De Mattias and other documents of the Congregation. Together we will reflect on the theme of adoration—in its fundamental meaning, in liturgical and devotional practice, and in its implications—always in relation to our own lives. This will be a series of chapters, the first of which is:

Adoration

Adoration: The Biblical Meaning of the Term.

Adoration, as a religious act, is directed exclusively toward God, before whom we prostrate ourselves, as Abraham did before the "three men at the oaks of Mamre" (Gen 18:1-2) and as the Canaanite woman did before Jesus, imploring him to heal her daughter (Mt 15:25).

It is a gesture of the utmost reverence and respect, which can also be immediately interpreted as an attitude of submission, dependence, and awe, according to biblical usage.

Prostrating oneself physically, however, is symbolic and a sign of what God truly expects from us:

that we give Him our attention,
that we open our hearts to Him!

Etymologically, "to worship" comes from the Latin ad os, meaning "mouth to mouth." It is complementary to "to obey," ob audire, meaning "to listen with the utmost attention." It is like saying: I am so thirsty for every word that comes from God's mouth that I bring my mouth close to His so as not to miss even a single "iota" of what He says to me.

"The Lord said: 'Listen to my words! If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, will reveal myself to him in a vision; I will speak to him in a dream. But this is not so with my servant Moses; he is the man of trust in all my house; I speak with him face to face'" (Num 12:6-8).

True Adoration is the soul of the prostrate body. True Adoration is life in relationship with God in a movement of Ascension toward Him, which springs from the heart, from the depths of our being, just as it was for Moses, to whom God "made His voice heard: He brought him into the cloud and gave him the commandments face to face" (Sir 45:5).

Adoration presupposes:

an encounter with the Lord and knowledge of Him
awe at who He is and what He does;
the joy of belonging to Him...
a total commitment of one's whole life, always and everywhere...

Jesus says to the Samaritan woman:

"Believe me, woman, the time is coming when true worshipers will worship God in spirit and truth; the Father seeks such worshipers" (Jn 4:21-24).

It is no longer a matter of place and time, of rituals or physical postures, but rather:

the remembrance of Him, as the Lord Himself so frequently asks throughout the Bible;
Paul's unceasing prayer (1 Thess 5:18);
listening that continues through every situation and action, shaping your life.

Our ASC Constitution wisely titles the fifth chapter: Our Life in Adoration and speaks again of "a life permeated by the spirit of Adoration," which it then defines as "loving adherence to the Lord" (LC 27).

The root lies in the teachings of Maria De Mattias, who wrote: "Oh, what a beautiful honor it is for us to think always of God, to live entirely for God. And this is granted to us by His infinite goodness, which allows us, as creatures, to be raised up into union with Him—indeed, it is commanded of us. At these reflections, what great courage does our soul not find? It would never leave the feet of its Lord, to listen to His voice of the sweetest love calling it to unite ever more closely with Him; it never tires of always blessing Him, loving Him, praising Him, and thanking Him with all its heart" (Letter 4/3/1841).

We will now look at other letters in which Maria reveals herself to us as a woman of adoration and, therefore, well-suited to lead others into a life of adoration.

2. Adoration: The Christian's Prayer

"Thus says the Lord: 'This people draws near to me only with their words and honors me with their lips, while their heart is far from me… and the worship they offer me is a mere imitation of human customs'" (Is 29:31 ff.).

It is an intense and enlightening lament, perhaps relevant even for us today.

The Lord "seeks worshippers," "looks at the heart," and wants us to be alive. I think of our habit of relying on the words of others to speak to Him, the Lord. I think of how difficult it is to let our feelings take over when we turn to Him. And perhaps what we call prayer is mere babbling that causes Him pain!

A distinction must be made: study and spiritual reading help us appreciate the resources and experiences of others; this is an advantage for our formation. Prayer, however, is the time when the Lord demands that I be myself.

Maria De Mattias wrote: "Prayer is a work of the heart. I try to hide it, but I cannot; it is not entirely within my power... the soul wants to be as it pleases; it does not even want the words learned or read in books. Ever since the Virgin led my soul into prayer, I have never been able to prepare myself; if I go prepared for a meditation, it does not suit my soul—it wants to move on to another..." (Lett. no. 454).

And in the meantime, "He wounds my heart more and more with His sweet love. Deep in my heart I feel a longing for Him that gives me peace, yet makes me yearn; I rejoice and I suffer..." (Lett. no. 83, April 1841).

Maria desires for us what she herself tells John Merlini about herself: "The breath of the heart accompanied by the sweet name of Jesus" (Lett. no. 629, undated). That is, a life immersed in God, a life of adoration: "always, always with Jesus"!

I believe we all feel the urgent need to open ourselves to deeper and more biblical dimensions of prayer.

Any form of worship—from the liturgy to devotional practices—needs a soul, a heart, so as not to degenerate into a mere ritual, into a formalism that would still cause the Lord to lament: "I detest, I reject your festivals.

Keep the clamor of your songs far from me; I cannot bear the sound of your harps" (Amos 5:21 ff.), "for I desire love and knowledge" (Hosea 6:6).

God takes pleasure in David because it is his life of adoration that then becomes a liturgical celebration: "In all his works he glorified the Most High with words of praise; he sang hymns to Him with all his heart and loved the One who had created him. He brought musicians before the altar. He brought splendor to the feasts by having the holy name of God praised. The Lord forgave his sins..." (Sir 47:9-10).

Constitution 31 helps us on this journey that makes us Adorers—not just in name: "We will listen to the Lord's message in Sacred Scripture, allowing His Word to penetrate our hearts. Aware that our growth toward the fullness of Love, to which God calls us, is a lifelong journey, we will respond faithfully in prayer as we journey toward the fullness of communion with our God."

3. Guidance from Maria De Mattias, Foundress

Maria De Mattias was, at her core, a woman whose life was one of adoration. Her deepest desire was for the Lord to fill her entire life, always: "Let us strive to love God with all our hearts… Oh, how lovable and infinitely good our Jesus is. In Him I find everything. I am certain, I am sure. In the depths of my nothingness, I will have everything in Jesus, with Jesus, for Jesus, and after Jesus, with the Virgin Mary. I wish that all might feel in their hearts what I feel, apart from myself, in Jesus Christ—that is, through His pure mercy" (Letter 12/16/1855).

As Foundress, too, in her directives and exhortations, Maria points out the ways in which we should pray in adoration. The focus is always on the Blood of Jesus: "... I congratulate them, my dear daughters, on the noble and generous offering they have made to God through their constant adoration of the Most Precious Blood of the Immaculate Lamb, Christ Jesus. May Divine Goodness keep us steadfast in the faithful adoration of the Precious Blood" (Letter, November 19, 1860).

This centrality of the Redeeming Blood is certainly what is new and distinctive. It is the Blood given by Jesus on Holy Thursday, the Blood of the "new and eternal covenant," the Blood of the Eucharist... In the charism of Maria De Mattias, however, it is received, contemplated, lived, and proclaimed above all as the gift of Good Friday:

“The Divine Redeemer, Jesus Christ, in triumph of His mercy and as a manifestation of His infinite love for us, deigned to shed, amid suffering and humiliation, all His precious Blood, as the price of our salvation and glory (Rules of 1857, Preface).

A direct reading of certain texts will provide a complete understanding of the Foundress’s thought.

In the Rules and Constitutions of 1857, Part II, Chapter Two: On Devotion to the Most Precious Blood. Art. 2 “Those who are free from their duties and the novices shall have time set aside each day for an hour of adoration of the Most Precious Blood.” Chapter Three: On Common Acts. Art. 2 “Every day, there shall be half an hour of communal meditation with prayers, and this shall be done, if possible, before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.” Part III - Chapter Three: On the Retreatants. Art. 3 “The retreatants shall visit the Blessed Sacrament, during which time the hour of adoration of the Most Precious Blood may be observed.” Chapter Five: On the Congregations. Art. 1 “The Daughters of Mary shall observe a day of retreat. In the morning there will be general Communion, and after lunch, an hour of adoration of the Most Precious Blood with the Blessed Sacrament exposed, if deemed appropriate.” Art. 3 “The hour of adoration will be spent in the church before the Blessed Sacrament or in the chapel before a devout Crucifix.”

More detailed information comes to us from some letters: “In 1834, the Adoration of the Precious Blood was begun by the Adorers; the hour of adoration took place every day” (Letter No. 514, undated). It is clear that adoration of the Precious Blood has been the defining characteristic of the institute from the very beginning.

“In 1837, a pious and devout practice spread among laywomen known as the ‘Adorers of Auxilium’ because they assisted the Virgin Adorers...” (Letter, August 8, 1855). “Let everyone spend an hour each day in adoration of the Blood of Jesus Christ...” In many letters (Letters nos. 528 and 638), Maria simply recommends “adoration of the Divine Blood.”

For Maria De Mattias, it is clear that the gift of Holy Thursday is a foretaste of that of Good Friday and that the Eucharist is the totality of Jesus, who on the cross allowed himself to be completely emptied of himself in keeping with the offering made in the Upper Room: “Blessed be my Lord Jesus Christ, who out of love for us chose to die in the most excruciating pain, to shed His Blood down to the very last drop, and to leave His whole self in the Most Holy Sacrament so as to dwell within our poor hearts...” (Letter, June 30, 1855).

It is also clear to Maria—a clarity drawn from experience—that times of adoration, of simply being present, are an essential path to a life of adoration. She insists to John Merlini: "If you believe the Rule needs to be shortened in some way, go ahead and do so, but just don't take away Adoration from me. For people outside the community, you can set aside certain times of the year as you see fit. As for us, I would always like to have Adoration" (Letter, October 19, 1856).

We find this richness in the current ASC Constitution, which states:

guarantees the right to time for prayer (St 34);
gives priority to the mystery of redemption (LC 28);
calls us to "remain for a long time, in adoring love, before the God of our life" (LC 12).

4. Adoration, a Driving Force for Mission (LC 1)

"What we have heard, what we have seen with our own eyes, what our hands have touched—that is, the Word of life—we proclaim to you" (1 John 1:1-3).

Mission is the story of an experience—the experience of Him, the Lord—it is a testimony, a sharing, the natural consequence of an event that shapes your life.

We can clearly see this in the Gospel accounts of the Resurrection and in the Acts of the Apostles.

Mt 28:9–10: "Jesus came to meet them, and they worshiped him. Jesus said to them, 'Go and tell my brothers…".

Jn 20:20–21: "The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them, 'As the Father has sent me, so I send you".

Acts 1:8: "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Acts 4:33: "With great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord."

I quote from *Consecrated Life*: “Mission, before being characterized by external works, is expressed in making Christ present to the world through personal witness (72). To carry out this service properly, consecrated persons must have a profound experience of God. The more one lives in Christ, the better one can serve others” (76).

Mission is the extension of adoration into daily life; it is both the fruit of and, at the same time, the test and measure of our adoration.

St. Catherine of Siena says: “In God you conceive love, and in your neighbor you give birth to it...”

One cannot give birth without first having conceived. St. Thérèse of Lisieux, the contemplative patroness of the missions, wrote: “I feel that the more the fire of love inflames my heart, the more I will say to the Lord: ‘Draw me to You,’ and the more the souls who draw near to me will also rush swiftly toward the fragrance of their Beloved, for a soul inflamed with love cannot remain inactive.”

“Without prayer,” says Bishop Angelo Camastri of Loreto, “the apostolate is a futile effort, a clanging of bronze, a clanging of cymbals, a display of oneself, an atheistic endeavor.”

Maria De Mattias conveys the same teaching to us through her “drawing back and reflecting,” a synthesis of her experience recounted in so many letters. In Letter 111 (undated), after describing her warm, passionate, and jealous relationship with the Lord, she concludes: “After this, I am left with a tenderness toward my dear neighbor, and I would like to run and call everyone, so that they may love Jesus.”

By adoring the Blood of Jesus, contemplating “the crucified love,” and spending long periods in intimacy with Him, we are transformed into “religious apostles” who “glorify the Lord and venerate His presence in those they serve” (LC 27); through adoration we are impelled (LC 1) “to give even our lives so that this divine Blood may be welcomed and blessed by all” (Rule 1838).

An ASC who assiduously seeks out Jesus, who is in constant contact with Him, is also committed to making her contribution to “the reform of the world” (Letter 115/5/1838), to work with energy and tireless dedication for “the beautiful order of things that the great Son of God, with His divine Blood, came to establish on earth” (Letter 13/11/1838).

5. Adoration Is Happiness

God is happiness, and our contact with him is contagious. Worship, then—that intimate encounter that draws us into the divine realm—is also a sure path to true peace, to the peace of Jesus, which is happiness.

The Song of Songs proclaims:

"Kiss me with the kisses of your mouth" (1:2).
Thus I am
like one who has found peace (8:10)

As we journey through the Book of Psalms, we are introduced to—and gradually convinced of—the truth that only the Lord gives rest and joy to our hearts:

"What joy when they said to me,
'We will go to the house of the Lord'" (122:1);
"I will come to the God of my joy, of my rejoicing" (43:4);
"Blessed are those who dwell in your house
and sing your praises always" (84:5);
"Goodness and mercy shall follow me
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for many, many years" (23:6).

In a more detached, philosophical language, yet with the same conviction, Aristotle, a pagan, arrives at the same conclusions: "The activity of the gods, which is distinguished by bliss, is a contemplative activity; and therefore, among human activities, the one closest to contemplation will be the happiest. And while for the gods the whole of life is blissful, for human beings it is so to the extent that they approach contemplation. Therefore, the more contemplation extends, the more happiness extends; and to those for whom contemplation is most characteristic, happiness also belongs—not by chance, but as a consequence of contemplation. Happiness will be the fruit of contemplation."

The one who worships the Lord fulfills the psalm:

"I am calm and at peace
like a child in its mother's arms,
like a child is my soul" (131:2).

Adoration gives rise to this confidence, this trust, this surrender—which is to entrust oneself in love to the One who has made Himself known, who has answered our longing:

"As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God:
when shall I come and see your face?" (42:2-3).

Maria De Mattias, in John Merlini's notes, is described as "a cheerful, joyful, and happy woman" (Funeral Oration). Furthermore, in her writings, she insistently urges us to be the same: "Let us be joyful in Jesus, let us serve our Spouse joyfully, let us be joyful and perfectly at peace," and so on.

She also points out the reasons and the way to do so: "Jesus dwells in your heart; love Him deeply, let yourself be guided by Him" (Letter 10/8/1856). "Let us lift our minds to Paradise and live in peace" (Letter 6/14/1857). "Let us place ourselves entirely in the Lord's arms; let us love Jesus very, very much" (Letter June 29, 1860). "Let us abandon ourselves to the loving arms of our dear Crucified Love" (Letter August 18, 1860).

The Rule of 1857 concludes precisely with this bold and most tender exhortation: "Let us place ourselves in the arms of the almighty Lord!"

Knowing Maria, the Foundress, we cannot speak of an escape from reality or of empty talk. Maria expresses the confidence born of love, the fruit of her prayerful intimacy, and thus justifies her peace and her joy.

In God's arms, in this heart-to-heart union that is, in fact, adoration, there is perfect joy!

Being Adorers by special vocation compels us to live in a way that first arouses curiosity in others, then a need, and finally a desire to be taken into God's arms to rest on His heart...

Only then will the world find peace, and humanity, restored to happiness, will sing of the goodness, beauty, and tenderness of its God—known not by hearsay, but beheld with its own eyes (cf. Job 42:5).



This work is structured as follows:

1. The holiness of Christians;
2. The holiness of Maria De Mattias;
3. The holiness of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ;
4. Responsibility for the holiness of the world;
5. The universal call to holiness and the ASC;
6. Holiness in the ASC Constitution.

2 Holiness

1. Holiness Among Christians

Elisabetta, the mother of an eight-year-old boy, told me: "Massimiliano heard a story about the life of Saint Dominic Savio at school. He came home all excited and promised: 'Mom, I want to be a saint, too! What do I have to do?' And I said: "You have to always obey, you have to study, you have to be kind —you have to... you have to... you have to...!" I made a long list of duties, but here's the result. A few days later, Massimiliano came back and seriously told me: "No, Mom, I'm not going to be a saint anymore!"

I believe this is the idea that plagues so many of us Christians: a constant effort to fulfill so many duties, often leading us astray from the true path to holiness. But the holiness to which God calls us is not something we construct ourselves; it is not the result of our own plans; it is not something objective to which we must laboriously conform.

"Unless the Lord builds the house,
the builders labor in vain...
In vain do you rise early in the morning,
and go to bed late... " (Song of Songs 127:1–2).

Holiness is God's call to look to Him, the Holy One, to listen to Him, the Holy One, and to grow intimate with Him. Our response makes us friends of God-saints! The call is individual, and the response He expects is personal, as attested by the variety of saints throughout the ages: from the Patriarchs, to the Prophets, to the Apostles, to the followers of Jesus up to the present day.

My own holiness, too, is the result of a loving communion with God, from which I derive a specific, unique identity.

The Holy Spirit helps me to grasp the Word that God speaks over my life; He sustains me in my response, which—in its uniqueness—is an essential piece of the beauty of God's work, a precious ray of God's image in the world. Holiness, therefore, is not first and foremost, nor essentially, a moral matter—a matter of good behavior according to our own standards. It is not the obvious result of devotional practices and good works; it is not the laborious and fragile construction of a positive image of ourselves to show to others; it is not the feeling of satisfaction that comes from being able to behave according to an established code.

Scripture says: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, the dwelling place of the saints, but only those who do the will of the Father… . Whoever listens to and does what He expects of us" (cf. Mt 7:21).

"Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Sam 16:7).
"I desire love, not sacrifice,
and knowledge rather than burnt offerings" (Hos 6:6).

Father Francesco Rossi De Gasperis wrote, referring above all to the history of the Patriarchs: "Scripture itself teaches that holiness is not merely moral —the practice of virtues—but rather the theological righteousness that comes from God as a consequence of a most unique election to friendship with Him and to belonging to Him, the Lord..."

The holy Christian is a humble, joyful person in love with God, whom he trusts, to whom he entrusts himself despite his own weakness and shortcomings, and whom he obeys with simple wonder at his Lord's condescension, without expecting results...

"Lord, my heart is not proud,
nor do I look down on others with arrogance.
I do not seek great things,
beyond my strength.
I am calm and serene
like a weaned child
in its mother's arms..." (Ps 131:1–2).

Jesus, the Holy One of God, has laid out this very path for us, becoming for us the "way" on which we can walk with the right direction.

I do not know how Elizabeth could have introduced her child to this dimension of our life of faith—so simple, yet so demanding. I do know how another mother helps us… Mary, the woman of the Word, continues to repeat to us: "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5).

2. The Holiness of Maria De Mattias

There was a time not so long ago when hagiography was all too often a ritual devoid of imagination, the result of a mass-produced and idealized concept of holiness. The saints were all portrayed as the same—good from the very beginning—and thus more admired than imitated!

Even Maria De Mattias was presented to us in this way: that not-so-distant era had molded her to fit its own uniform and bland models, giving us a blurred portrait of her that no longer had anything in common with the strong woman of the healthiest, most ancient tradition—the woman who experienced turmoil and fervor, restlessness and struggles, mystical experiences, and a consuming zeal for the salvation of the world.

Maria's holiness lies precisely in this demythologized, human reality of hers, which—open to the Spirit—achieved a gradual, painful maturation, and is therefore worthy of imitation! Maria reflects on her dull and restless youth and senses that there is a word God wishes to speak to her, a direction He wishes to propose: "The Lord was dispelling the darkness of my ignorance from my mind, making me realize that in Him alone lay true consolation, not where I had been seeking it—that is, in the vanities and pleasures of this world... I felt drawn with great vehemence to love Jesus. I also heard it said to me that the graces granted to me were not for me alone, but to help other souls... I felt that I had to devote myself to the service of God and to a life of the Cross, in the likeness of Jesus Crucified" (Letter, July 25, 1838).

Maria receives this Word, treasures it, discerns it… until it becomes her plan, her will—because it is God's will for her life.

Fidelity to this will—desired, sought in prayer, and gradually realized through the cross and the power of the Blood of Jesus—is the holiness of our Foundress, a passionate adorer of Jesus "crucified and gloriously risen for us," of that Jesus the Redeemer whom she wishes to make known to all, by every means, consumed by the hope of seeing heaven and earth restored

“to their proper order” and all peoples celebrating salvation together with joy.

Maria is clear that holiness for her and for the ASCs comes through this commitment to God’s call. In fact, she writes concisely: “God has called us to holiness, which for us consists in loving Jesus Christ and working for the salvation of souls” (Letter, Nov. 1, 1854).

When circumstances or socio-religious structures attempt to stifle the Word that God has sown in her life—the Charism with which He has marked her —she asserts her right to conform, first and foremost, to the demands of God’s will.

“Your Excellency tells me to decide whom I must obey... I have never desired, ever since I dedicated myself to the service of Our Lord Jesus Christ, to do my own will, but only God’s... To save souls for Jesus... Moreover, I have never compelled anyone to do my will... Therefore, I implore Your Excellency to be fully at ease regarding this, assuring you that I will not do my own will, but God’s...” (Letter May 17, 1850).

When they sought to make her conform to canons and traditions, she became rebellious out of obedience to God. She broke schedules and cloister rules to speak of Jesus and His Blood to shepherds and peasants. Far ahead of her time, she was a woman of the Word in the context of the Paschal Mystery.

When she sensed that “the wall of her body is crumbling,” she declared herself “happy to fulfill the sacrifice she had made to God of her whole self” (Letter, June 27, 1865), consistent with what she had previously written: “Let us remain steadfast in our desire to please God always and forever, so that we may truly say: Lord, the work you have entrusted to me is complete on my part, and I have done everything with your grace” (Letter, January 28, 1866).

When Maria felt burdened by a weight too great to bear, tormented by the doubt that she might be deluded or overly enthusiastic, she prayed Psalm 131, “throwing herself into the arms of the almighty Lord, imploring the intercession of the Divine Blood and the protection of the pure and immaculate Mary” (Constitution of 1857).

It was precisely the Most Holy Mary, so dearly loved by the Foundress, invoked to obtain enlightenment, and called “sweet Mother Mary,” who guided her to Jesus and, in Jesus, to holiness. Here is her testimony: “I can

truly say that, in years past, the breath of my heart was almost always accompanied by the Most Holy Name of Mary, and now more often than that is the sweet Name of Jesus, but how can I find the Son without the Mother? Oh! Mary, be my Mary" (Letter No. 629, undated).

When we lamented the delay in the Church's official recognition of this woman's human and spiritual stature, we always found comfort in the testimony of Merlini—a profound scholar of Maria—as he stood before her body: "What a beautiful soul! Blessed is she!" And he began the Miserere, but after a few verses he paused and, inspired, intoned the Te Deum! (M. Colagiovanni: God's Will Is Enough for Me).

3. La santità delle Adorataci del Sangue di Cristo

"We joyfully give thanks to God who, has graciously called us to fulfil our baptismal consecration by following Jesus the Lord, in a life of adoration that impels us to apostolic service" (LC 1).

Awe, gratitude, and the joyful living out of this call are fidelity to God—a path to holiness for us. An ASC is holy when she is an Adorer of the Blood of Christ!

The two realities coincide!

For everyone, holiness is the fulfillment of God's expectations for one's life, and for us, this expectation is that we be ASCs!

"Remember that God has called you to this Institute to become holy" (Letter no. 661, undated). "The daughters of this holy Work must all be holy" (Letter 125, undated). "Let us become holy, for this is our vocation" (Letter, April 1843).

In practical terms, an ASC who is open to the Spirit and faithful to her vocation:

"loves our dear Jesus very much" (Letter, Sept. 26, 1855);

"is united to his cross" (Letter, March 1843);

"works hard for Jesus and Mary, always with the aim of even giving her life for the salvation of souls, which cost Jesus his Blood" (Letter, March 16, 1859);

“she holds the Rule in the highest esteem, respect, and love, for it is the expression of God’s will for us...” (Preface of 1857 Rule), “our guide for living the Gospel according to the special charism that God gives us in the Church; the indication of the way in which God calls us to holiness” (LC 5).

It is God who sanctifies us, as Maria De Mattias expresses in the closing prayer of many of her letters, when on our part there is adherence to His will.

The Constitution authoritatively assures us: “The Spirit sanctifies us as we offer our ministry to others, identifying ourselves ever more closely with Christ Crucified and Risen” (LC 3).

A generic “do-goodism,” a piety drawn from and nourished here and there, the imitation of edifying examples that are, however, not closely related to our spirituality, and unfocused ongoing formation disorient and slow down not only our own journey but also that of the community. The Constitution further states: “We will strive throughout our lives to attain the Paschal identity of Christ to which the Lord calls us. Aware of this vocation, we will help one another’s growth toward wholeness and holiness” (LC 47).

The Church, too, has a clear message: “…a profound call to holiness concerns, first and foremost, the consecrated life… In following Christ and in love for his person, there are certain aspects regarding the growth in holiness within the consecrated life that deserve special emphasis today. First and foremost, fidelity to the founding charism and the resulting spiritual heritage of each Institute is required. In this spirit, the need for a renewed reference to the Rule is once again urgent for every Institute today, for it contains a path of discipleship characterized by a specific charism authenticated by the Church” (VC nos. 35–36–37).

In this regard, reading the biographical profiles of our sisters upon their passing can be a valuable aid.

The return of an ASC to the Father’s house is not merely a news item, but true ASC hagiography!

The death of an Adorer of the Blood of Christ is the fulfillment of a life at the end of which we must be able to say: “Lord, the work you entrusted to me is complete on my part, and I have done everything with your grace” (Letter, Jan. 28, 1866).

In death, we celebrate God’s faithfulness, who builds his masterpiece upon

our poverty. Therefore, reading about the life of an ASC must be a praise to God, who has marked us with His Word—a Word that, like every Word of the Lord, returns to Him after having accomplished what He sent it to do (Is 55); it must be a grace of renewed trust and a longing for faithfulness.

We can be holy like Maria De Mattias, like the sisters who have gone before us, through the power of the charismatic word that we have received and allowed to bear fruit in our hearts.

I conclude this section by hoping that we may know how to "console" our Foundress, who "wished to see all her daughters as saints" (Letter, March 23, 1864). This is what she prayed for; this is why she entrusted us to the care of the Most Holy Virgin Mary and never ceases to repeat to us: " Be cheerful, my dear daughter; Jesus loves us, and His Mother is our most beloved Mother, who loves us so much and will not fail to give us the help we need; and will we become saints? Yes, if we want it too; that is why we have become Adorers of the Divine Blood—because we want it. So take courage and persevere" (Letter 2/18/1855).

4. The Universal Call to Holiness

This is the title of Chapter V of Lumen Gentium, which then, in no. 39, explains: "All in the Church are called to holiness, according to the words of the Apostle: 'Indeed, this is the will of God, that you should be sanctified' (1 Thess 4:3)."

The text expresses the Church's obedience to God's command: "Be holy, for I am holy" (Lev 19:1), a command that Peter echoes in his first letter: "Just as the Holy One is holy, so you also must be holy" (1 Pet 1:14).

For a believer in Jesus and the Father, holiness is an integral part of the call to faith: "Baptism is a true entry into God's holiness through incorporation into Christ and the indwelling of his Spirit. To ask a catechumen, 'Do you wish to receive baptism?' means at the same time to ask him, 'Do you wish to become holy?' It means placing before him the radical nature of the Sermon on the Mount: 'Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Mt 5: 48; NMI no. 31).

Paul, in his letters, reiterates several times: "saints by vocation," "called to be holy," "all the saints send you greetings"—that is, those baptized in the Lord Jesus.

I qote John Paul II again: “As the Council itself explained, this ideal of perfection must not be misunderstood as implying some sort of extraordinary life, practicable only by a few geniuses of holiness. The paths to holiness are manifold and suited to each person’s vocation. I thank the Lord for having granted me the grace to beatify and canonize so many Christians over the years—among them many laypeople—who sanctified themselves in the most ordinary circumstances of life. It is time to reaffirm with conviction for everyone this high standard of the ordinary Christian life” (NMI, no. 31).

John, too, had already seen the vision of the “immense multitude standing before the Lamb” (Rev 7:9), singing the new song to Him:

“You were slain
and with your Blood
you have redeemed for God
people from every tribe,
tongue, people, and nation” (Rev 5:9).

The Blood of Jesus is the way of salvation for all; it is the gateway to holiness for all. Jesus comes to reveal this to us right where we are: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door to me, I will come in to him, and I will dine with him, and he with me” (Rev 3:20).

Mary of Nazareth opened her life to God; she said her “yes,” and she—greeted by the Angel as “full of grace”—experienced the great things that never cease to amaze the world.

The Church clearly points to the union between gift and responsible acceptance: “The followers of Christ, called and justified in Jesus Christ, have truly become children of God and sharers in the divine nature through baptism, and are therefore truly holy. They must preserve and perfect, by living it out, the holiness they have received. The Apostle exhorts them to live as befits saints” (Eph 5:3; LG 40).

We must be able to affirm with Paul: “By God’s grace I am a saint, but his grace in me has not been in vain” (1 Cor 15:10).

To remain at this high standard of Christian life, we need Prophets! Perhaps this is the time when consecrated persons will finally reclaim their true missionary identity: to be, for others, a conscience and a longing for holiness!

“A renewed commitment to holiness on the part of consecrated persons is

today more necessary than ever, also to foster and sustain every Christian's striving toward perfection. It is therefore necessary to awaken in every believer a true longing for holiness. Indeed, consecrated persons are part of the dynamic life of the Church, which thirsts for the absolute reality of God and is called to holiness. They are witnesses to this holiness. The fact that everyone is called to become holy can only serve to further inspire those whose mission is to remind others of this" (VC 39).

I conclude with the Pope's words: "May the Most Holy Virgin accompany us on this journey... I entrust her to us as a sure guide on our path. 'Woman, behold your children'—I repeat to her, echoing the very voice of Jesus and speaking to her on behalf of the whole Church, expressing its filial affection" (NMI no. 58)

5. The Universal Call to Holiness and the ASCs

"We give thanks with joy to the Father who has enabled us to share in the inheritance of the saints" (Col 1:12), "having predestined us to be his children through Jesus Christ, in whom we have redemption through his blood" (Eph 1:5, 7).

These texts are a defense of Jesus, but also a defense of us, who are the family of the saint par excellence—and therefore saints ourselves!

But not everyone knows this! That is why the world is sad, cold, and lacking in brotherhood. Not everyone knows that God, in Jesus, through the Blood of his cross, has put an end to our exclusion from his home and has reconciled the world to himself! (See Col 1).

Scripture, expressing the urgency of spreading the word (JP II), exclaims: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good news"! (Rom 10:15) —the feet of the new prophets and apostles, especially of consecrated men and women.

" Consecrated life is a proclamation of what the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit, accomplishes with his love, his goodness, his beauty… The primary task of Consecrated Life is to make visible the wonders that God works. Thus, Consecrated Life becomes one of the concrete traces that the Trinity leaves in history, so that people may sense the fascination and longing for divine beauty" (VC 20). "Consecrated Life continually brings to the forefront of the People of God's consciousness the need to respond to God's love with holiness" (VC 33).

For us, the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, this general statement takes on concrete form by drawing on the guidance found in our documents: “Remember that God has called you to this Holy Institute to become holy and to sanctify other souls who cost Blood to our Spouse, Jesus Crucified” (MDM, Letter 661), “so that all may experience the fruits of the Precious Blood” (MDM, Letter 677).

The Blood of Jesus is “the source—indeed, the life-giving river—that flows and spreads out for the sake of all the children of Adam in order to sanctify them” (Preface of the 1857 Constitution).

We, the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, are the channel through which the Blood flows to reach those who are far away; we are the chalice of this Blood that others must drink to feel its warmth; we are the sign of love of this Blood that others can see and through which they can “feel the charm and longing” for the source: Jesus, the brother who leads us to the Father!

This is why Maria De Mattias says: “I will not shun suffering, but I am glad to suffer for my beloved neighbor, for whom my Jesus shed all His Most Precious Blood” (Lett. No. 71).

Following Maria, our Foundress, we will kindle a light in the darkness of many and help them find and set out on the path toward the Holy One; we will accompany them to the feast that God prepares for everyone who returns to his home.

God says: “I will welcome you and be a father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters... ” (2 Cor 6:17–18).

Our Constitution states: “We will have no peace until the transforming love of Christ has reached the life of every person and the whole of society” (LC 33); this text does not present us with tasks to perform, but rather a longing for God to be set ablaze, a love to be discovered, and a song to be sung. The song of the redeemed.

“All you peoples, clap your hands...
for the Lord did not spare his own Son
to free us from our sins...
So we who were far away
are now, through the Blood of his Son,
back in his house once more!
Sing hymns to Jesus,
O all you saints of his...

for your holiness is the fruit of his love
and of the blood with which he has washed us!
And then set to work
so that heaven and earth may know and celebrate
the gift of the blood that sanctifies...”

The example is Holy Virgin Mary, pregnant with Jesus, who travels the long journey from Nazareth “toward the mountains” to serve Elizabeth at Ain-Karin; she caused the child in the womb of her “elder relative” to leap for joy and set in motion a process of blessing that extends “from generation to generation,” forever, because the Holy One “has looked down from heaven and shared his divine life with us” (Ps 84).

And so, always on the move, in all kinds of weather, in every situation, carrying Jesus within us, to spread the great news of Redemption to every tribe, people, and nation!

6. Holiness in the ASC Constitution

A generic do-goodism, a piety drawn from and nurtured here and there, the imitation of edifying examples that have little to do with our spirituality, and unfocused ongoing formation—all of these disorient us and slow down not only our own journey but also that of the community.

For us, the Word of God is summarized and described in the Rules and Constitutions. The Constitution is the 28th book of the New Testament, also written by the Holy Spirit for us!

From *Vita Consecrata*: “...there are certain points concerning the growth of holiness in consecrated life that deserve special emphasis today. First and foremost, fidelity to the founding charism and to the resulting spiritual heritage of each institute is required...” (no. 36).

“In this spirit, the need for a renewed focus on the Rule becomes urgent, for in it and in the Constitutions is contained a path of discipleship marked by a specific charism authenticated by the Church. Greater attention to the Rule will undoubtedly offer consecrated persons a sure guide for seeking appropriate forms of witness that can respond to the demands of the moment without straying from the original inspiration” (37).

From the Rules of 1838: “Let us all, as daughters of the institute, take courage to observe these rules with perfection of spirit; Divine Grace will

not fail to help us according to His word: there is much to suffer and the toil will be great, but greater still will be the merit we will receive in Paradise. The name we bear—Adorers of the Divine Blood—reminds us that we must be ready to give even our lives, so that this Divine Blood may be adored and blessed by all, and that everyone may benefit from it for their own salvation. Let us strive, as much as we can with the help of Divine Grace, to work toward our own sanctification and that of others."

From the Bylaws and Constitutions of 1857: The entire preface, particularly the conclusion of the Preface: "This, then, is what God requires of us, and what the Institute sets out to achieve. But how can we attain it? By faithfully observing among ourselves the highest esteem, respect, and love for the Rule, and by practicing it as strictly as possible. Yes, this is the most effective means of becoming perfect Adorers of the Divine Blood and useful daughters of the Institute, so as to draw down divine blessings upon ourselves and our work, and to be fit and capable of cooperating in the salvation of others. Therefore, all those whom divine goodness will call to serve with us under the banner of the Divine Blood should remember to keep the Rule at the center of their hearts: for although it does not impose any specific sin—not even a venial one—it is nevertheless the expression of God's will for us, and the path by which the Lord wishes to draw us to Himself and make us instruments of others' salvation." .

From Part Two, Chapter One: Moral Conduct of the Religious. "Each Religious must frequently reflect that she has been called to this Institute to sanctify herself through those means which God's goodness presents to her in the state she has embraced, and that these are not merely relationships, but duties to be fulfilled toward God, toward herself, toward the Community, and toward her neighbors...". (Art. 1).

Constitutions of 1934 "1. The general purpose of the Religious Congregation of the Adorers of the Most Precious Blood is to strive, with the help of divine grace and through constant commitment, for the sanctification of its members. The specific purpose is to cooperate in the great work of Redemption, striving with all possible zeal for the salvation and sanctification of one's neighbor, in accordance with these Constitutions; always aiming at the imitation of Jesus Christ and the greater glory of God.

2. To achieve the first goal—their own sanctification—the Adorers of the Most Precious Blood commit themselves to observing with fervor and constancy all the prescriptions contained in these Constitutions. The means for achieving the second goal—the sanctification of others—include various ministries, including foreign missions.

3. The spirit that the Sisters of this humble Congregation must cultivate is that of striving unceasingly, with all their strength, toward the perfect imitation of Jesus Christ, as well as honoring and glorifying His Most Precious Blood in a special way."

1992 Constitution, Code of Life: "This Constitution expresses for us, the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, the spirit and way of life through which God calls us to holiness in apostolic service. It is our guide for living the Gospel according to the special charism that God gives us in the Church. Through our religious profession, we commit ourselves to following it as we move forward in hope, in fidelity to God, and in covenant with our sisters throughout the world."

From the General Administration's Report to the 1987 General Assembly: "... the Constitution is a book without boundaries, a book truly of the Spirit in which the insights of the Founders, the richness of our spirituality, the apostolic imperatives, and the demands of consecration in an apostolic community harmonize in a solid and timely synthesis; we must give priority to this shared text in order to discover it and to sense how far ahead of us it is in every aspect of our international reality... ".

Message from the 1989 Congress: "...may the Constitution continue to signify for us the specific and special Word of God to be received and meditated upon in our hearts until it becomes flesh of our flesh and blood of our blood, just as Mary of Nazareth made the Word of God addressed to her..."

From the Proceedings of the 1991 General Assembly: "1. Writing the Constitution with our lives. We, the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, with grateful hearts, declare that our Constitution is truly a word of God for us, which:

expresses the Spirit's plan and the passion of Maria De Mattias;
identifies us as women consecrated to the mission for the Kingdom of God.
We receive this Word with a burning desire to live it out."

From Sister Giuseppina Fragasso's letter of promulgation (July 1, 1992): "...The grace experienced at the founding of our Congregation by Maria De Mattias and the first Adorers—a grace lived out from generation to generation—is renewed for us today in this Constitution...".

From a comment at a meeting of Local Superiors (May 29, 1994): "This 1992 Constitution provides a unified synthesis of our identity in light of our

charism and spirituality. Through its various chapters, like the pieces of a mosaic, it composes and illuminates the call that the Holy Spirit has made to us through Maria De Mattias, and continues to make to us today through the Church's appeals, the world's urgent needs, and our situation as the ASC Apostolic Community for the Kingdom of God; it frees us from the temptation to borrow a general lifestyle or specific attitudes based on current trends, fads, or personal preferences. By recognizing God's gift of our specific identity, our life is filled with joy, wonder, gratitude, harmonious unity, vitality, and active and effective efficiency...".

Conclusion from the Rule and Constitutions of 1857: "These, my daughters, are the concise means that Providence offers you in this Rule for your own sanctification and that of others, and for the glory of that divine Blood which was shed for the common redemption and salvation of all.

Therefore, with full trust in this precious Blood, which is the object of our love and our adoration, strive for the most perfect observance of what is prescribed in this Rule, and therefore make a point of reading it, especially on the day of Retreat and also during the time of the Holy Exercises.

Do not let internal and external difficulties and obstacles frighten you or divert you from your virtuous path. And if the enemy of your well-being is intent on destroying what is good, be ready to defend and protect yourselves, often placing yourselves in the arms of the almighty Lord, imploring the power of the Divine Blood, the protection of the pure and Immaculate Mary, and the effective intercession of St. Francis Xavier.

May working and suffering for God always be your glory; and may God be your consolation on earth and your reward in heaven for the works and sufferings you endure. Amen."



Introduction

In the auditorium of a school I attended many years ago, there was a Latin inscription that read: “Not with words taught by human wisdom, but with words taught by the Spirit” (1 Cor. 2:13). It is this statement by Paul that I would like to use to introduce myself—with a touch of boldness. I am not here to amaze you. I have nothing to say that you do not already know. I am here with my heart completely open to the Spirit, my voice lent to Him as He reminds us, in the reality of this

The spirituality of ASC governance



day, of God's Gift and His expectations for our Congregation. I hope that the time we spend together will be an experience of the Upper Room gathered around Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

This theme brings us back to the essence of the ASC charism, to its practical meaning in Jesus and in us.

Working here in the light of the charism is fundamental, absolutely necessary. It is the theophany that gave us life and keeps us alive. It must be known, but above all embodied in our words, attitudes, assessments, plans, and decisions so that it may fulfill the purpose for which it was given...

Remembering this gift ensures that we walk in the footsteps that God Himself has traced for us throughout history. This is, in essence, biblical teaching: "These are the commandments that the Lord has commanded you to observe, so that you may put them into practice by keeping them all the days of your life—you, your children, and your children's children—so that you may be happy and your numbers may increase greatly. Keep these commandments firmly in your heart; you shall teach them to your children, and speak of them when you sit at home, when you walk along the road, when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand; they shall be as frontlets before your eyes; and you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your city gates" (Deut. 6:1–9) .



Monsignor Bonados of Chile wrote: "Without memory, we do not know who we are; we wander bewildered, not knowing where to go. Without memory, we have no identity." And Father Dalmazio Mongillo, O.P.: "Without memory, there is no future. Those who have no memory cannot

even live in the present, because memory is an indispensable component of decision-making and action."

The General Assembly is, by its very nature, a gathering in the presence of the Lord to celebrate the renewal of the Covenant. It is therefore a propitious time to recover the full memory and transform it into prophecy.

This General Assembly, which explores the theme "ASC Governance in the Service of the Common Mission," has the primary responsibility of reorienting the role of authority as a special guarantee of fidelity to the charism: "Authority in the Congregation—at the general, provincial, and local levels—is a visible guide that expresses the shared vision in fidelity to the charism. They will encourage us to live as Adorers of the Blood of Christ" (LC, 42).

I. The ASC authority is the guardian of the charism.

The ASC charism, like every charism of Consecrated Life, is the passage from the Gospel that the Holy Spirit assigns to us to live out radically and to present in an incarnate way to the People of God.

It enables us to portray and reflect a mystery of the life of the Lord Jesus for the common good; it places us in contemplation of an icon of Jesus. Which passage of the Gospel? Which Jesus for us ASCs? The Jesus who has called us precisely as Adorers of His Blood (LC 6) and whom Maria De Mattias describes as follows: "The Divine Redeemer, Jesus Christ, as a triumph of His mercy and a manifestation of His infinite love for us, consented to shed, amid suffering and humiliation, all His precious Blood, as the price of salvation and glory. Yes, He gave it all; He gave it for all, and He never ceases to give it" (Preface of Bylaws and Const. 1857).

The Jesus who draws us as ASCs is Jesus the Redeemer, the One who redeems us with His love, heals us with His wounds, and washes us with His blood; He is the Son of God, the crucified Lord...

"The sight of the Crucified One," Maria says of herself, "was to my Heart like a sweet arrow that pierced me..." (Lett. no. 13). And then she refers to him, time and again, as:

"Our Crucified Love"
"Our beloved Spouse, Jesus Crucified,"

"Divine Crucified Spouse"
"Dear Jesus Crucified"
"Our Crucified Good"
"Divine Lamb"
"Our Spouse of Blood."
And Maria always defines us ASCs as:
"Brides of Jesus Crucified."
"Beloved brides of the Divine Lamb"
"True brides of the Crucified Lord."

The Jesus of the ASCs is the Jesus who was drained of his blood out of love, to restore his world to the Father "restored to its beautiful order"; he is the Paschal Lamb of whom Peter writes: "You were ransomed with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish or defect" (1 Pet 1:19) and to whom the Book of Revelation sings: "The Lamb who was slain is worthy to receive power and wealth, wisdom and strength, honor, glory, and blessing" (Rev 5:12), "for you were slain, and with your blood you have redeemed for God people from every tribe, language, people, and nation" (Rev 5:9).

Our Constitution summarizes this reality in LC 2: "We ASCs are consecrated to the adoring and redeeming love of Jesus Christ, who shed his Blood to free us from sin and reconcile us in love." LC 22: "Our ASC charism is deeply rooted in the mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection. Ours is a Paschal identity, signed in the Blood of the Lamb."

This image of Jesus is the foundation of our ASC apostolic spirituality. This image is the object of our remembrance. As we contemplate it "ever more intensely," it shapes us and makes us the very charism that we carry forward through history. The Crucified Jesus whom we contemplate pours out his Blood upon us, so that Maria De Mattias was able to write: "His Blood is ours" (Letter, Feb. 4, 1856); it flows through our veins. We are, thus, chalices of his precious Blood.

Joy and gratitude spring from this awareness: "All peoples, clap your hands, for Jesus loved us and washed us with his Blood" (MDM). "Proper" prayer leads us to a deeper understanding of the charism.

LC 28: "In our whole life, especially at Eucharist and other prayer, we adore Christ the Lord who has redeemed us with his Blood."

As MDM, "both personally and as a community, we will give priority to the contemplation of the mystery of redemption" (see also St. 34)

The remembrance of the charism becomes a motivation for mission: “since the purpose of the institute is united to the purpose of the healing bath (of the Divine Blood)” (Congress 5/7/1835). “Our principal aim must be to strive to invite people to share in the fruits of redemption” (Const. and Bylaws of 1857).

“Through our charism, we participate in the Redeemer’s struggle against the power of darkness and sin” (LC 25). “Our mission is to make the love of Jesus Crucified known to all” (LC 34).

“Variety, scope,” and radical commitment in ministries directed toward “all stages of life” (1857), “using every possible means” at all times, while we are always willing to labor and even give our lives for the salvation of souls” (Letter, Dec. 6, 1839) and, above all, a style of service. “Our name, Adorers of the Blood of Christ, expresses our specific vocation: a community of religious apostles whose lives are permeated by a spirit of adoration, contemplative women who glorify the Lord and reverence his presence in those they serve” (LC 27).

The ASC sings and walks through the world “without sandals” (Ex 3:5), always ready to point to the Blood of Jesus as the reason for her life and her attitudes.

The blood of Jesus is the true revolution in history. Through it, we change our family status. From “creatures” and “stewards of creation” (Gen 1–2), we become daughters of God. “For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus; for as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. You are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26–28).

“God sent his Son so that we might receive adoption as children. You are no longer a slave, but a son” (Gal 4:4–5). “Behold, I am making all things new… To the one who is thirsty I will give water from the spring of life without cost. I will be his God, and he will be my son” (Rev 21:5–7).

The ASCs receive this word as their charism and are a living witness to this event in the world:
They tell of Him
They celebrate Him, and above all
They demonstrate this by “respecting the dignity and divine destiny” (LC 37) of every person “bought by Jesus at a high price” (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23).

This attitude is:
the cross of the ASCs
their asceticism

their life poured out
with a love that mirrors that of Jesus...

The Blood that Jesus never ceases to give is, in fact, that of the ASCs, according to the covenant made with Him. We return the blood to Jesus to help Him continue to bring forth other precious children to the Father. Thus Jesus, the Redeemer, also changes His "social status" and, from the only-begotten Son of God, becomes the "Firstborn among many brothers" (Rom 8:29).

The ASC who sings and walks through the world "without sandals" (Ex) is a sign of what the Blood brings about... ; in this way, she fulfills her missionary vocation.

The object of the ministry of those in authority in our Congregation is us, the Sisters. MDM wrote to Sister Luisa Garretti, the "president" in Acuto: "The family that the Lord has entrusted to you are the souls who cost Him His Blood" (Letter 4/18/1863).

ASC authority "respects the dignity" of its Sisters, venerates each one of them as a chalice of the Blood of Jesus, and helps them grow as ASCs by dying—that is, by shedding the blood they have lent to Jesus for their sake.

I read from the LC No. 14: "Superiors, being accountable to God for the souls entrusted to them, should exercise their authority in a spirit of service toward their sisters in such a way as to express the love with which God loves them. They should govern their subordinates as children of God and with respect for the human person."

This encouragement is reiterated in the Constitutions (LC 42): "The Sisters to whom the ministry of authority is entrusted shall exercise it in such a way as to express God's personal love for each one."

And in many of the Statutes, it is clear that those in authority are experts in the charism, and their sole concern is to inspire their sisters by expressing it in their goals, methods, and interpersonal relationships.

ASC authority is an ASC that is fully integrated between its "permanent" identity and its "temporary" role; within the local, provincial, or general community, she sings and walks "without sandals" because it is the sacred ground where the Lord has called her to work.

II The Role of Divine Providence in the Founding and History of the Congregation

"Just as the rain and the snow
fall from the sky and do not return there
without having watered the earth
and made it fertile and brought forth shoots...
so shall it be with the WORD
that goes out from my mouth:
it will not return to me empty,
without having accomplished what I desire,
and without having fulfilled
the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:10–11).

God becomes the Word to make His will known to us—a will that is difficult for us to understand: "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts higher than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9).

To penetrate the Word of God, we need guidance and help... . And God provides through the mediation of people and events.

The ark of the Flood is providence for Noah; for Abraham, it is the angel "on the mountain where the Lord provides"; and for the wandering people, it is "the pillar of cloud" and "the pillar of fire" with which "the Lord went before them" (Ex 13).

And Noah himself, and Abraham, and Moses, and the Prophets—these are all providence...

The sale of Joseph, the famine in the land of Canaan, slavery in Egypt, and the misfortune of Job—these, too, are providence...

Providence is the constant action by which God sustains all things and leads them to their end: "You love all that exists... you spare all things because all are yours, O Lord, lover of life; your incorruptible Spirit is in all things" (Wis 11:24, 26–12:1). Faced with those who seek to turn them away from the Word of Jesus, they protest: "Whether it is right in the sight of God to obey you rather than him, judge for yourselves" (Acts 4:19).

Maria, too, protests against those who seek to restrain her by stifling the Word that resounds in her life: "I have never desired to do my own will, but only God's..." (Letter, May 17, 1850).

And she also contradicts Merlini when the Director insists on observing rules of enclosure, monastic schedules, and ministries reserved solely for women: “In all women’s communities, the doors are kept firmly closed around the time of the Hail Mary. Let this serve as the rule.” And Maria: “In the evening, until about one o’clock at night, I am occupied with the boys” (Dec. 1842). “The oratory is filled morning and evening with country children and poor shepherds...” (Letter no. 578). “At this tender service there was a great multitude of people… behind the women there were about a hundred men...” (Letter Feb. 11, 1845). “She could be seen speaking about God to women, men, priests, friars, etc.” (Letter Jan. 17, 1857).

God’s Providence for this ASC community is evident in Maria De Mattias’s willingness to serve. Her trusting welcome of the Word—which is the charism—made her an excellent mediator, enabling God:

to plant us “under the shadow of the cross, amid the flowing streams of the Divine Blood, to draw souls to Paradise” (Letter 1/20/1857).
to open us up—from the obscure little hill of Acuto, from the small group led by Anna Farrotti (who later defected)—to the vastness of the world;
to make us an international, multilingual, and multicultural community, just like the Blood that “like a fountain—indeed, a life-giving river—spreads and flows out for the sake of all the children of Adam” (Preface of the 1857 Constitution).

Maria had foreseen this path and had hoped for it: “It is clear that the blessed God wills that His Most Precious Blood triumph, and He wills this for the good of the whole Church” (Letter 4/4/1850).

She also laid the groundwork for this by establishing over 60 communities during her lifetime, by welcoming the German foundation (1860), and by sending her sisters to England... (Letter 7/29/1863; Letter 8/1/1863). From those beginnings to the present day, other Adorers—some more famous than others—have, through the power of that same charism, been the Paul of our history, providing the impetus and progressive expansion toward ever more ecumenical geographical horizons.

In some cases, persecutions and wars have turned into an act of Providence to spread “the glories of the Divine Blood,” just as they did in the early days of the Church, when, by scattering the believers, they spread the good news of Jesus the Lord.

Over the years, as the congregation grew and circumstances changed, we Adorers have come to discover and appreciate the prophetic power of

Maria's insight regarding the "variety and scope of ministries and charitable works to which God calls us" (Bylaws 1838 and Const. 1857).

She was already able to affirm: "Our Institute promotes many pious works for the salvation of souls; in addition to the school, there are the Associations on feast days, of unmarried and married women, nurturing them with Christian doctrine, lessons, devotional singing, etc.... The Spiritual Exercises for anyone wishing to participate for ten or fifteen days —or even for a single day for those who wish to make a retreat...; spiritual preparations for girls preparing for First Communion, etc... If the premises are large enough, the boarding school can be kept open, etc..." (Letter 6/6/1854).

This attitude, rooted in the charism, has taken shape—and continues to do so—in vigilant and diligent Adorers who, even at times causing some inconvenience, have providentially kept us mindful of our role as "blood for all."

These sisters, the common thread running through our entire history, free us from the lukewarmness veiled by prudence, from the stability that—especially for us ASCs—is unnatural and a mortal disease.

The countless times Maria has spoken of the "salvation of souls" entrusted to this Congregation, she has consistently linked it to our willingness to embrace the cross and to be crucified with Jesus.

I think of the illness that has consumed and continues to consume the lives of so many of us, even in our time! I think of the bloody martyrdom of the five Adorers in Liberia. I think of the suffering that afflicts our lives in the most diverse ways. And I praise God's Providence, which makes us like Jesus the Redeemer, in fidelity to his Word by which he has called us to "complete in ourselves the sufferings of Christ for his Church" (LC 25).

The Congregation's journey from Maria to the present day has been guided by our official leaders—those who have exercised authority within our community. This is the most providential aspect of our history.

III The Spirituality of ASC Leadership

The experience of Peter and the Church has been repeated in our history: "We know from Scripture that all things work together for the good of those who are called according to God's purpose" (Rom 8:28).

Maria De Mattias also believed this: “This Congregation of ours is entirely God’s work. He will see to it that it is brought to completion for the glory of His Most Precious Blood” (Lett. no. 857).

After all, this has always been God’s way of teaching us; just as He did with the Israelites, He continues to remind us: “The Lord is God; there is no other besides Him” (Deut. 4:35). “When the Lord has brought you into the great and beautiful cities that you did not build, to the cisterns that were dug but not by you, be careful not to forget the Lord. And when your son asks you about it, you shall answer: ‘The Lord performed great and awesome signs and wonders for us’” (Deut. 6).

God’s history teaches us that we can—and must—plan, anticipate, and organize, but with the attitude of one who knows how to be a mediator, and that the Lord may ask us to change course. While we work, we must learn to be still—that is, to know how to pause before God, before His people, and before the events of His history—and to listen to the Word that He continues to address to us, and thus to evaluate and decide, drawing above all on the Constitution, the 28th book of the New Testament, written specifically by the Spirit for us ASCs (cf. LC 5) and thus a providential guide for a journey oriented toward the right goal.

This is discernment, a duty for all Christians and therefore for each one of us ASCs. Through discernment, we attune ourselves to God, we savor the taste of his presence, and we enter into the dynamic of his ever-new life.

Don Tonino Bello wrote: “There is no longer any madness in our daily actions. The Lord gives us wine that makes us dizzy, yet we show no signs of drunkenness. It is discernment that we lack. We do not have a contemplative, docile heart—one that allows itself to be taught and guided, that surrenders to the Word of God. Instead of a heart, we have a computer in which everything is stored and processed based on numbers (…). Deep, clear, brilliant feelings, brimming with imagination, risk being stifled in our “computerized” soul.”

But if “descending” is—or should be—the fundamental attitude of every life, the indispensable space for one’s obedience to God, those in authority are called specifically and above all to the ministry of discernment within the community; they are the ones entrusted with the task of “guiding us through prayer, dialogue, and prophetic appeal, to discern what God wants for each and every one of us” (LC 42).

Those in authority are the experts in discernment, because, in God’s plan,

they are our Moses. Discernment is what makes the difference in a leader's style of governance. It may seem to put the person in authority in their place, to slow them down, but in reality it makes them wise, allowing them to collaborate with God and accomplish His great works.

Solomon prayed specifically for the wisdom that is the fruit of discernment.

"You have chosen me as king over your people;
with You is wisdom...
It knows what is pleasing in Your sight
and what is in accordance with Your decrees.
Send it down from the holy heavens
so that it may assist me and stand by me
in my toil
and I may know what is pleasing to you.
It will guide me in my actions
so that my works may be pleasing to you" (Wisdom 9).

I conclude by including you in this reflection. God has summoned you to the Horeb of the Congregation.

You must: speak about authority, choose the general superior. You are called to be our providence during this transition to a new millennium. It is up to you to allow God to reconsecrate us to the adoring and redeeming love of Jesus Christ, so that we may entrust to the future a Congregation clothed in the new garment of the feast (G. Fragasso).

From you we wish to hear once more—in its entirety, and therefore effectively and fruitfully—the founding Word of this ASC Community: a word of love and blood. From you we hope for active, mature, responsible, and attentive discernment, truly concerned with what is best, in line with God's one will for us. From your discernment we hope to "draw life for the future from the roots of the past" (St. 4), so that this Congregation—destined to gather "all" peoples and to celebrate with them the event of Jesus, his love, and his Blood—may sincerely continue to hope: that "the heavens and the earth may be filled with the glory of Redemption."

For this reason, we have all bowed our heads, everywhere. I pray even now, turning to Mary of Nazareth:

Holy Mary, handmaid of the Word,
help us always to discern the Word
that God speaks to us ASC
and then lend us a hand so that

we may remain faithful to it to the very end.
Grant that the page of the Gospel
entrusted to us by God may shine forth
in our personal and communal lives
and resound here unceasingly.
Holy Mary, Mother who stood
at the foot of Jesus' cross,
teach us not to compromise on the demands
of our vocation as ASCs
and, as we contemplate Jesus the Redeemer,
may we learn anew each day
that our place is
where the longing and the
need for salvation are greatest.
May this gathering
be a time of courageous renewal
in the grace of our origins and
of vigorous momentum toward a future
worthy of our past.
Holy Mary, present in the Upper Room,
remain maternally active in this Assembly
so that the Holy Spirit may renew his wonders,
and these sisters may once again tell us,
in a way that pierces our hearts
and disposes us with conviction even to "die
content for Jesus Christ and to bring
souls to his side; they cost him
Blood" (Letter, Oct. 20, 1855).
Amen.



LC 21

The encouragement found in the Code of Life of our ASC Constitution is based on a prerequisite: animated by authentic apostolic obedience. In fact, the attitude of active obedience arises from a conviction that serves as both its motivation and driving force. Therefore, our understanding of “obedience” shapes the way we engage in mission and ministry.

Life Charter: some articles 5



Christian obedience is a salvific event! It is fulfilled when the believer allows God to use his or her life for the "reformation of the world." Zorzin wrote in his book Obedience and Truth: "In Hebrew, there are no words for 'to obey' or 'obedience.' This concept is expressed by the verb to listen, which corresponds to the acceptance and execution of a command. The word that is heard is transformed within the listener and becomes a will-desire to please the one who spoke."

Listening to the message is not limited to mere hearing, but becomes the attitude of one who pays attention in order to make oneself available for the mission entrusted to them by the Word. Obedience, then, is attuning oneself anew to God, who repeats his expectation of a new heaven and a new earth, and responding together with Mary: "I make myself a servant of this Word so that you, God, may be happy!" This involvement in God's affairs, however, is such a great thing that it even posed difficulties for Mary... And Jesus, the Son, had to struggle—and not only against Satan—to discern and carry out the Father's Word. We are not exempt from this darkness, from this uncertainty. The desire to obey, even for the most receptive heart, involves effort and struggle... but the Holy Spirit, whom the risen Jesus has left us as our guide, comes to our aid through clear and assured guidance.



"We will seek God's will in Scripture and in prayer, in the Church's teachings, in our own talents and inspirations and those of our sisters, in the needs of the people, in the events and changes of our world, and in the changing circumstances of daily life..." and, as ASCs, "in the Constitution, in the decisions

and appeals of our superiors" (St. 28), whose task is precisely to guide us in discerning what God wants for each and every one of us (LC 42). To draw especially on this last form of mediation is to acknowledge, like Mary and like Jesus, that the Word of the Father is above us and that we need to trust, to entrust ourselves, to let ourselves be led… by another.

"For while we are all called to discern, in a passionate and constant search, God's 'today' for us, we must also believe that some are called, in a more specific way, to the 'ministry of discernment' within the community, and it is to them, within our shared obedience to God, that the final word belongs" (GA Acts 1991).

Active and responsible obedience (PC 14) is, therefore, not a renunciation of one's own intellect and will; it is not an abdication of one's own personality. Rather, it is a "conversion" of my "will" to "will differently" from how I would have "preferred."

"Every time a person listens to and obeys the Word that God transmits through the mediation of authority, they perform an act that engages their intellect and will... By obeying legitimate authority, the person fully and personally assumes responsibility for what they do or do not do... because the moment they decide to accept the mediation and to obey, the action springs solely from them." (Zorzin).

"All of this means that we look to authority as the one on whom we wish to depend because we see in her authentic help in coming to know that will of God for which we are passionate" (A. Pigna).

We are in the realm of adult obedience—active, creative, tireless, concerned solely with "the goal of doing good for the souls that cost the Son of God so much Blood" (Letter 5/2/1838), "using every possible means," offering "all necessary help," "always ready to labor and even to give our lives..." (Letter Dec. 6, 1838). Upon this attitude, which so characterized Maria, the Foundress, her words of blessing and encouragement descend:

"May God bless them with blessings of detachment from all their own will and fill them with Holy Love… Yes, may God fill them all with Charity and Holy Obedience… Oh! Good God… Oh! How many souls… Let us awaken our faith…" (Letter, Dec. 18, 1849)

lC 33

“Urged on by the Spirit, we remain restless until the transforming charity touches the life of every person and the whole of society.”

The Gospels say of Jesus: “He went throughout all the towns and villages, teaching in the synagogues and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom… When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd” (Mt 9:35–36).

And when “his own” were still slow learners, “he sent them out to proclaim the Kingdom of God” (Lk 9:2), expressing an urgency, confirmed also by the instruction, “Do not greet anyone along the way” (Lk 10:49): the Good News must not be delayed...

In prayer, He taught us to ask, “Father, may your Kingdom come,” and in His teachings, He outlined a hierarchy of values:

“...do not worry about what you will eat or drink, and do not be anxious; for the people of this world worry about all these things, but your Father knows that you need them. Seek rather the Kingdom of God, and these things will be given to you as well” (Lk 12:29–31).

True to his words, Jesus “even laid down his life, to the point of death” (Rev 12:11), to “bring about the salvation and the Kingdom of our God” (Rev 12:10).

Thus, when, in taking leave of his disciples, he reaffirmed his commission to them: “Go and teach all nations” (Mt 28:19), Jesus also handed down a model of conduct—his own—that of a tireless man, without rest, without “a place to lay his head” (Mt 8:20), solely and always focused on “restoring the Kingdom to the Father” (1 Cor 15:24), an apostle in haste and without rest...

All of this is summarized in the opening statement of LC 33. The Constitution conveys to us a zeal that, like Jesus’ own, is a gift of the Spirit and the fruit of prayer; it is, in other words, the power of the ASC Charism and the commitment not to let it go to waste; it is the exhilarating awareness of being consecrated to express the love of Jesus who saves us by becoming blood; it is, in particular, the responsibility that entrusts us with the world to love and to wash with our own blood!

We ASCs have “no time to waste”—neither on “idle chatter,” nor on “lamentations,” nor on fruitless withdrawal into ourselves and our own

shortcomings. This and more is what Maria De Mattias urges us to do, edifying us, moreover, with her dedication as an apostle “in a hurry,” as a woman without rest—just like Jesus—consumed by “tenderness toward her dear neighbor” and by the desire to run and “call all souls to love Jesus.”

Very effective is the testimony-reflection of Teresa De Sanctis who, with simplicity and wisdom, starting from the admission of her limitations and fears, through her knowledge of Jesus, arrives at an overwhelming and luminous missionary celebration: “I find it very annoying to converse, to speak with my neighbor. Moreover, I have poor eyesight; I lack the strength to endure constant fatigue: therefore, I am not called to this Institute. I would say: what I need is a retreat where I can devote myself, according to my inclination, solely to Contemplation. But in meditation, what do I contemplate? A God made Man for the salvation of souls. Moreover, what did this incarnate God do? He toiled, He sweated even blood, He suffered excruciating torments, and in the end He died on the ignominious scaffold of the Cross. Why? To save our souls. And what does this God ask of us? To love our neighbor as ourselves. And it is by the love we show our neighbor that the true love we have for God is known and measured. So, what should I gain from this meditation? If I love Him, I must say and resolve: let everything be sacrificed, and let us help our poor neighbor, most of whom are plunging into the abyss. Thinking back on the love of Jesus, on his agonizing concern for the loss of souls, how could I remain idle and not smash the iron bars, the grilles, the doors, and the walls, to break out and cry out: “Come, O people, and run to love Jesus, who toils, who agonizes, who dies for your sake!” (Letter, Dec. 7, 1852).

Amen! May this be true of each one of us ASC, and we will give the Father the joy of seeing His expectation soon fulfilled, and to the Lamb the blessing and praise of the redeemed from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation! (Rev 5:9).

LC 33b

“Let us give thanks with joy to God, who has graciously called us… to a Life of Adoration that impels us to Apostolic Service!” (LC 1).

The Constitution sheds light on our language, which is fundamental for communication. Our adoration is not limited to, nor is it exhausted by, the meaning and form that the term has taken on over time. We do not merely adore Jesus in the Eucharist; we are Adorers by charismatic vocation

throughout our entire lives; we are not called merely to set aside times for adoring prayer, but to make adoration a way of life, just as the Constitution further specifies: “Our name, Adorers of the Blood of Christ, expresses our specific vocation: a community of religious apostles whose lives are permeated by adoration, contemplative women who glorify the Lord and venerate his presence in those they serve. For us, adoration is a loving relationship with the Lord” (LC 27).

This means, echoing many of Maria De Mattias’ exhortations, living immersed in the memory of Jesus the Redeemer, with our hearts always filled with passion for him:

with our gaze always fixed on the splendor of his Paschal image,
with our tongues always full of his praise,
to “fill heaven and earth” with the wonder that intrigues and draws people in!

Thus, as life gradually becomes adoration, it also becomes mission, witness, and a testimony to Him, Jesus Christ, who gave His life even to the point of shedding His Blood for people “from every tribe, language, people, and nation.”

Our witness, then, is the reverence with which we approach others, as reliquaries and monstrance of the Blood of Christ the Redeemer. Certainly, a life of adoration is built through the time spent with Jesus, in seclusion with Him… “We will be faithful in giving time to being fully present in adoring love, before the God of our life…” (LC 13).

In this time of intimacy, the Spirit forms us, instructs us, until we are “graduated” as Adorers… perhaps over the course of our entire lives and without a break!

This persevering quest is fidelity, the virtue of the strong and of those in love, of those who, “captivated” by Jesus, feel that it is worth pursuing, by every means, assimilation to Him, which gives flavor and meaning to our missionary existence.

Adoration and witness are therefore one and the same reality, a single, unifying element; they are what Maria, our Foundress, admirably summarized as portraying and reflecting. The love that Jesus communicates to us is effusive, contagious, and visible. This path is fundamental for us ASCs, but it is just as much so for every believer, especially for those whom Jesus draws to Himself through His mystery of love and Blood.

A heart open to God during frequent, intense, and prolonged periods of prayer, and a life laid bare before Him in constant loving rapture—these are what make the disciple, the missionary, and the witness who, through their own life, recounts the life of Jesus learned through prayer.

LC 35

"Jesus began to wash the disciples' feet… then he said to them: 'If I, the Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet… I have set you an example, so that you may do as I have done'" (Jn 13:14); "… I am among you as one who serves" (Lk 22:27).

Service that brings one to one's knees before anyone else is the sign of truly following Jesus; serving is the disciple's mission—that is, to place one's life at the service of others to the point of laying it down, just as Jesus did and for the same purpose: to make the world the Kingdom of the Father once more.

Serving is essential.

St. Paul states: "It is no cause for boasting for me to preach the Gospel; it is a duty for me... For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all... I do everything for the sake of the Gospel" (1 Cor 9).

To serve "as women," then, indicates—within the shared identity of servants that unites women and men who believe in Christ—simply "the diversity of characters" (message of the Second Vatican Council to women) that are complementary and reciprocal. To serve "as women" is a qualification of the service itself, which will have the following five characteristics:

1. Diligent and trustworthy, as praised in the Book of Proverbs.

"The value of a virtuous woman is far greater than pearls... Her husband's heart trusts in her. She brings him happiness every day of his life.
She procures wool and linen and works them willingly with her own hands...
She rises while it is still night and prepares food for her family.
Not even at night does her lamp go out.
She opens her hand to the needy, extends her hand to the poor...
She speaks with wisdom, and on her tongue is the teaching of kindness. The bread she eats is not the fruit of laziness.

Her children rise up and call her blessed, and her husband praises her...” (Prov. 31).

2. Loving and courageous, as the story of Catherine of Siena tells us. She, whom the disciples called “Mom,” was described as: “A woman of heart with a woman’s heart.” Her voice—it has also been written—has a vast range of inflections that reflect her soul’s ability to attune itself to others in the most varied situations. The secret? Her love for the entire human family (G. Cavallini).

3. Passionate, as Thérèse of Lisieux exclaims: “Charity gave me the key to my vocation. I understood that if the Church had a body, composed of various members, the most necessary, the noblest of all, was not lacking in her: I understood that the Church had a heart and that this heart was ablaze with Love.” I realized that only Love set the members of the Church in motion: that if Love were to be extinguished, the Apostles would no longer proclaim the Gospel, the Martyrs would refuse to shed their blood... So I exclaimed: “Oh Jesus, my Love... I have finally found my vocation! My vocation is Love.”

4. Tender and radical, heroic in the example and teaching of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, that “little pencil in God’s hands” who urged her sisters: “Be kind and merciful. Let no one come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God’s kindness—kindness on your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your warm manner...

We are the reflection of God’s kindness... Always offer a joyful smile... Give everyone not only your care, but also your heart.”

5. Tinted with red—and here I am referring to Maria De Mattias: “I have placed my hopes in the merits of the Blood of Jesus Christ, and I hope not to be disappointed. He is the one who gives me this great desire to help my dear neighbor in these times, using every possible means so that poor sinners may be converted in their hearts to God. In this Institute, they will find all the necessary help, at all times, while we are always willing to labor and even to give our lives for the salvation of souls” (Letter 20, December 6, 1838).

Every woman who makes herself a servant of the Lord, like Mary of Nazareth, shares, in some way, in her vocation as a mother, to bring into the world the inexhaustible tenderness of God’s feminine heart.

LC 36

The Second Vatican Council reaffirmed to the Church and to the world that Consecrated Life is essentially missionary.

To consecrated men and women, Jesus "communicates his way of loving in order to impel them to serve others through the humble gift of self" (VC 75). By its very nature, service is the appropriate response to a need; in order to effectively meet the expectations of others, the servant requires vigilant dynamism, self-sacrificing availability, and a capacity for adaptation that may be his or her "cross." We learn this from God's attitude toward us:

"I have seen the misery of my people... I have heard their cry… I have come down to set them free." (Ex 3:7).

The literature concerning us, A. Cencini asserts, increasingly clearly highlights this distinctive feature: "It is an apostolic service that is often new…, it is a choice made by contemporary people…, it is a placement at the margins of sociological and geographical boundaries."

"The future of consecrated life is decisive for the life and mission of the entire Church. Its successful outcome depends, in particular, on missionary zeal in response to today's challenges." (Cardinal Hume).

"Consecrated men and women are entrusted above all with the task of apostolic holiness, which becomes history but never mere repetition. "The task of men and women religious is to be the vanguard that opens new paths to respond to new and urgent needs, stepping aside when others can perform the same service" (Synod of Milan).

"A religious community must essentially be a missionary community, open to today's world, to today's problems, faithful to the sufferings and hopes of people today..." (Cardinal Pironio).

At the beginning of the Synod on Consecrated Life and at the conclusion of the document Vita consecrata, John Paul II also authoritatively affirmed: "The consecrated man or woman is, par excellence, the universal brother or sister on whom other brothers and sisters know they can always count, finding a listening ear, a welcoming presence, and shared solidarity..." (October 2, 1994).

“You have not only a glorious history to remember and recount, but a great history to build… Look to the future… Always be ready, faithful to Christ, to the Church, to your Institute, and to the people of our time... In this way, you will be renewed by Christ day by day... to wash the feet of the poor with Him and make your irreplaceable contribution to the transfiguration of the world...” (VC 110).

As Adorers of the Blood of Christ, we find in both our early and recent documents precisely this dimension of undefined service, which calls for a constant need for discernment and a journey of exodus, in fidelity to the nature of our Mission. “To strive with all our strength, for the sake of others, to help them share in the fruits of redemption at every stage of their lives... From this, the variety and scope of those duties and charitable ministries to which God calls us—and which, for our part, we must wholeheartedly accept and fulfill with fidelity—become abundantly clear” (Bylaws 1857, Preface).

And the current Constitution specifies: “To remain faithful to our tradition of meeting the needs of the People of God at every stage of their lives, we continue to engage in various ministries...

To remain faithful to our mission, we must all grow in flexibility, mobility, and openness to continue the same ministry or to take on a new one” (St. 43).

“Aware of the many and great needs of the Church and the world, we will support and assist in the formation of lay leaders who will gradually take our place so that we may respond to other apostolic needs” (Bylaws. 32).

This agility in the Spirit, this youthfulness of heart, this active fidelity—repeatedly called for in the Constitution—are nourished by contemplation of:

“a God made man for the salvation of souls...
His loving longings...
A God who toiled, sweated even blood, suffered excruciating torments, and in the end died on the ignominious scaffold of the cross...” (Teresa De Sanctis).

Therefore, “let us be filled with zeal and fill our hearts with charity… The Blood of Jesus is Blood shed with such pain and such love… Let us fill our hearts with courage, fearing not even death, so that He may be seen at all times as glorified, blessed, and loved by everyone” (Letter 2/19/1853).

I conclude with a statement by a Cameroonian poet, offering a Christian and missionary interpretation of it:

"To live in a single life
in a single city
in a single country
in a single universe
to live in a single world
is a prison"! (Ndjock Ngana).



I. The ASC mission is to obey God

As society becomes increasingly legalistic and less humane, increasingly bureaucratic and less evangelical, we too
"servants of Christ Jesus,
apostles by vocation,
chosen to proclaim the Gospel of God...
Jesus Christ our Lord...
to bring about obedience to the faith
among all peoples,
to the glory of his name" (Rom 1:1–5),

The ASC mission



we risk being constrained by situations that deem the implementation of the Lord's word inappropriate, outdated, or even dangerous.

This was also the experience of the Apostles: "The high priest began to question them, saying, 'We strictly ordered you not to teach in this man's name anymore.' Then Peter replied, 'We must obey God rather than men…'" (Acts 5:27–29). The Church's mission is precisely to obey Jesus' command: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

The mission, as such, is the task of every believer; every baptized person bears witness to Jesus. But men and women religious make it the sole commitment of their lives, according to the special charism they have received, which is always missionary in nature (cf. VC 72).

We ASCs, too, "promise God to share in the mission of this Community within the Church" (St. 99). Therefore, we proclaim Jesus, the Lamb sacrificed for our salvation, the Crucified Redeemer, who died and rose again in glory, thus expressing our Paschal identity marked by the Precious Blood, and living out our charism, deeply rooted in the mystery of the Lord's death and resurrection (cf. LC, no. 22).



The minutes of the congress of July 5, 1835, specify that Maria De Mattias came to the "resolution to found this pious Institute under the banner of the Divine Blood, since the purpose of this Institute is united to the purpose of this salutary bath."

Thus, while the command for all is to go and preach, for us ASCs it is linked to the vision of the Blood, which inspires the urgency with which Maria expresses the need to "strive with all our strength and with all means appropriate to our vocation to invite people to share in the fruits of Redemption" (Bylaws. 1857, Preface).

"We will have no peace," the present ASC Constitution also urges, "until the news of Redemption has been proclaimed throughout the world."

An ASC comes to true life through contemplation of the Blood, which transforms her into an ambassador

of love, because the Blood is the "expression, measure, and pledge" of God's love for humanity;
of respect for every living being, because she is marked by the Blood with which Jesus "has redeemed people from every tribe, language, people, and nation";
of hope and joy, because the Blood of Jesus is the rainbow of God's mercy that embraces the whole world;
of beauty, because the Blood of Christ "restores the beautiful order of things."

And this is the unique and unchanging mission of the ASCs in every place and at every time.

Maria De Mattias outlines our missionary calling in some of her letters as follows: "My intention is not simply to be a teacher, but to plant and bring to fruition the new institution of the Divine Blood" (Letter 10/7/1837). "... an order of virgins who labor under the title of the Divine Blood, wholly dedicated to the good of the souls of our neighbors" (Letter Jan. 29, 1839). "From this work we hope for the salvation of many souls who cost the Son of God so much Blood" (Letter Aug. 26, 1838). "This is our principal aim: to draw souls to the open heart of Jesus Crucified" (Letter 3/13/1840). "God wishes to make use of the great work of the Adorers to spread the glories of the Divine Blood, for the salvation of many souls" (Letter 5/17/1850). "My desire is to see this beloved people of mine all gathered together in heaven. I hope that the Divine Blood, shed for all, will pour out abundant blessings upon them" (Letter 1/28/1866).

I conclude with Maria's wish: "...may heaven and earth be filled with the glory of the Blood..." and this also—and above all—so that we, Adorers of this redeeming Blood, may make it known and sing of it, from the depths of our being to the farthest corners of the world.

II. The ASC Mission is expressed through its ministries

“Let it be adapted to local customs, and let the doctrine of the poor of Jesus Christ be taught after the Hail Mary” (Letter May 29, 1956).

In this way, the Foundress anticipates for us the concept of inculturation—that is, of placing ourselves within our environment with attention to reality and to people. Thus, the Mission takes on flesh and finds meaningful expression in services that respond to needs and that also call for our vigilance, creativity, and vitality.

And while the ASC mission is unique and unchanging, the ministries through which it is expressed are many and varied, reflecting the diversity of historical and geographical contexts.

This has been the case for us from the very beginning: Maria writes of “forming” people to be “worthy daughters of that bride whom Jesus acquired with his Blood” and of “assisting and guiding them on the path of virtue and observance of God’s holy law throughout all the stages of their lives. From this, she continues, the variety and scope of those duties and charitable works to which God calls us become apparent—and which, for our part, we must wholeheartedly accept and faithfully fulfill” (Bylaws 1857, Preface).

The breadth of the commitments undertaken and recommended by Maria is also evident in the Letters. So that “sinners may turn wholeheartedly to God,” we must use “every possible means”; we must offer “all necessary help, and this at all times” (Letter Dec. 6, 1838).

The ASC Constitution thus links the past to the present: “To remain faithful to our tradition of meeting the needs of God’s people at every stages of their lives, we continue to engage in various ministries. Among these are educational works, spiritual exercises, pastoral ministry, lay associations, domestic service, care for the sick and the elderly, and social service. To remain faithful to our mission, we must all grow in flexibility, mobility, and readiness to continue the same ministry or to take on a new one” (St. 43).

“Mindful of the generous love that led Maria De Mattias to devote herself entirely to various services for the benefit of our dear neighbor, our ministries are diversified according to the needs of others and our own giftedness. We will encourage one another to be available and responsive as we discern together in docility to the Spirit the ministries to which the Lord calls us.” (LC 36).

All of this, not in the generality of action..., but in the specificity of the Charism that places us alongside our "dear neighbor" to bring them closer to Jesus, the Savior.

The poverty that we ASCs are called to eradicate is that of sin, ignorance, and the rejection of the Redemption wrought by Jesus through His Blood. An ASC devotes all her missionary passion to finding ways to collaborate with Jesus in saving the world.

And when she can no longer "give herself fully" in active ministry, the ASC intensifies her prayer, suffering, and death… (Cf. LC 35)!

The Acts of the '99 General Assembly embrace and renew this apostolic challenge for us, challenging us to engage critically with the "present," to allow ourselves to be drawn into its current issues, and to translate "the powerful word of the charism" into appropriate responses of:

charity
reconciliation
solidarity
respect for life.

"For us," the Acts of the General Assembly affirm, "the path of inculturation is a permanent call. Listening to the Spirit, we choose inculturation as the preferred way to live out our mission in the Church and in the contemporary world."

Drawing on Paul's text (1 Cor 9:19–23), we may conclude: "Making known the love of Jesus crucified is a duty for me. For this reason, I make myself a servant to all to win as many as possible: I make myself weak with the weak, to win the weak; I make myself all things to all people, to save someone at any cost. I do everything for the sake of the Gospel…".



1. The Foundress

This news is not the kind that goes unnoticed… It's spreading from person to person, shaping our plans, inspiring reflection and joy: Maria De Mattias will be officially proclaimed a saint by the Church! A milestone that:
confirms our conviction;
lends authority to the Foundress's desire and hope that we all become saints;
encourages us to take things seriously, to live out the "high standard" of our baptismal and religious consecration ourselves.

Back to the writings of Saint Maria De Mattias

In this luminous, special Advent season for our congregation, our hearts are warmed, our most beautiful and daring hopes resurface, and our plans multiply. In the face of our possible weariness or resignation, the "news" resounds like the words of Isaiah:

"Let the desert and the parched land rejoice,
let the wilderness exult and blossom.
Let it blossom like a narcissus;
yes, let it sing with joy and exultation...
Strengthen the feeble hands,
make the faltering knees firm.
Say to those whose hearts are faint: Take courage...
They will see the glory of the Lord,
the splendor of our God" (Is 35:1–4).

Our tribute to Maria of Vallecorsa might also consist in reading some of her letters—a "prophetic legacy" of inestimable value for those who wish to know the Foundress. She poured her heart, mind, and soul into them. As we read through them with love—as such a document so richly deserves—Maria's personality stands out clearly, amid enthusiasm and "anguish," mystical elevations and earthly commitments to the Kingdom, in a crescendo of "loving passion" that transforms everything into a celebration of the mystery of Jesus the Redeemer.



Writing, however, cost Maria effort and "sweat," as she herself recounts in

the letter with which we begin our reflection and which could be titled: “You Will Write for Others” (Lett. no. 438).

“The letter in which she writes these words, like many others, is a synthesis of various communications concerning everyday life and life in God. Addressed to Giovanni Merlini, it deals with the model for the garment to be sent to the ‘sisters in France,’ with brief references to other ‘concerns.’ In the P.S., then, Maria opens her heart to the Director and thus introduces us to the secrets of her tireless ministry of letters.

‘My parent never wanted to allow the daughters to learn to write…’: a great deprivation for Maria, a constraint that led her to write: ‘I feel distressed when I write and it doesn’t go well…

The situation is one that, in the Bible, makes the “little ones” God’s preferred instruments:

- so it is with the old age of Abraham and Sarah, to whom a numerous offspring is promised;
- so it is with the “hesitant speech” of Moses, sent to “act on God’s behalf before Pharaoh”;
- so it is with the youth of Jeremiah, “appointed as a prophet to the nations”;
- so it is with the situation of Elizabeth and Zechariah, of Mary of Nazareth, and of so many other witnesses of faith.
-

Maria of Vallecorsa does not know how to write... yet she trusts: “Once, I seemed to hear in my heart a voice, almost tangible, saying: You will write, not for yourself, but for others.” Maria then “strives to do good,” because “when I do not write, my spirit becomes troubled, and when I have satisfied this need, my heart expands in peace...”

The Spirit wants Maria to be a “woman of the word”—a word that is proclaimed, but also written! An undertaking for her, a gift for us, for our benefit, entrusted to the humility and courage of a woman who was not educated, but a woman of faith! Maria thus teaches us how to allow ourselves to be used by God, not for our own success, but in service of others. A docile pen, even if inexperienced, in the hand of the Divine Writer, she was able to leave us a collection of letters that is a canticle to Jesus, the Crucified Love who captured her heart, Jesus who was “so beautiful,” as she calls him in the letter in question and in others as well.

We are certainly grateful to her, and for her sanctification, we want to make

our gratitude and admiration concrete through a renewed and deeper attention to her writings.

We cannot increase her holiness, but we can certainly increase her joy and her pride in us... and for us, this celebration will above all be fruitful!

2. Always, Always with Jesus

"Tell Jesus often that you love him dearly, that for his love you are willing to die. Here is our love, Jesus; here is our life, Jesus; here is our all, Jesus. Let us accompany Jesus on all his paths... Always, always with Jesus... With Jesus we think, with Jesus we speak, with Jesus we keep silence, with Jesus we pray, with Jesus we live, with Jesus we die... Read this to my dear Isabella, and help her fall in love with Jesus...".

This original and vibrant hymn is an expression of Maria De Mattias's prayerful attitude—her "treatise" on the life of prayer. Beyond methods and forms, places and times, the essence of prayer is Love—the loving relationship that touches every aspect of life and transforms it into a song, a sign, a commitment. The one who prays is a lover who focuses his or her life on Him, Jesus, "at every moment," "without ceasing" (Lk 18:1; 1 Thess 5:17).

Augustine wrote: "The one who desires prays always... if you desire always, you will always pray. When does our prayer slumber? When love and desire grow cold. We do not pray with words, but with what we carry in our hearts: with the attentiveness of our mind, with pure love, and with a simple and unified desire."

This prayer is fulfilled in the Spirit when we allow Him to dwell within us: in Him we not only pray, but we are prayer!

Then we discover the wonderful truth of John Climacus's statement: "One cannot learn to pray from teachers other than the depths of one's own heart. Prayer possesses its own teacher within itself," and of Isaac the Syrian: "Whoever carries within himself the Spirit of God and offers Him hospitality in his own heart and spirit becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit; whether he eats, sleeps, or stays awake, prayer clings to his soul. The simple movements of his spirit are so many silent voices that, in secret, raise their psalmody toward the invisible!"

Maria De Mattias allowed the Spirit to work this miracle of love within her.

Through the depth of her writings, she helps us on this pilgrimage toward our hearts, toward our inner selves, so that we may be transformed—like her and like Mary of Nazareth—into women of the Spirit who bring forth Jesus, the Lord of our lives and of the whole world.

3. Suffering joyfully

"Maria De Mattias's writings, in the variety and multiplicity of the topics they cover, are above all a hymn to the cross of Jesus"—a tapestry of insights and testimonies that, with wonder, lead us into the depths of the mystery of Easter.

In the letter in question, Maria offers us a prayer, suggesting words of tenderness and blessing for the "Divine Crucified Spouse": "Oh! My dear Jesus, blessed be that patience which, with such love, made you endure so much contempt, insults, and slaps. Oh! God, with what humility! Blessed be that patience which made you endure so many scourges and torments."

Jesus, contemplated in his painful Passion, is above all a model to imitate. Thus, the same prayer continues with a bold, unpopular request: "Imprint in my heart a great desire to suffer"!

In recounting her vocation to Father Giovanni Merlini, Maria had confided: "I felt that I had to give myself to the service of God and to a life of the cross, resembling Jesus Crucified" .

Her prayer, then, is a desire for fidelity to a call to radical assimilation to Jesus in his Mystery as Redeemer. Jesus is the "suffering servant" who took upon himself the sin of humanity and ascended the Cross to "nail there the document of our debt and cancel it" (Col 2:14).

Maria, contemplating Jesus, learned that the cross is the high price to be paid to defeat sin. This is how her prayer continues: "Imprint upon my heart … a great zeal to draw souls to Your Cross, bathed in Your Most Precious Blood; the Cross that opens the gate of Paradise for us, the Cross beloved by the Son of the Most High God."

Maria, a passionate Adorer of Jesus Crucified, is convinced that without the Cross and without the Blood there can be no salvation. She constantly reiterates this, in every way, so much so that she feels the need to justify herself: "Let them say that I always speak of the Cross..." (Letter 3/6/1856),

but this is because the Cross is inseparable from Jesus, who has asked us to "help him save souls"; we "must be content to die" in order to offer him adequate and effective help!

"If we are called to this most beautiful work, watered by the Blood of the Divine Redeemer, we must suffer with peace, with goodness, with charity, in imitation of our Crucified Spouse. I cannot bear the thought of some who want the merit of education without suffering; oh, what ignorance!"

Maria never strays from this Paschal certainty: her eyes are fixed on the Crucified One, her life ever more closely united to that of Jesus, with a further desire directed toward us: "I wish that everyone could feel in their hearts what I feel" (Letter 12/16/1855), that is: "Suffering for Jesus Christ is the touchstone: if we truly love Jesus, we embrace the crosses He sends us; blessed are those who embrace the crosses with love and live hidden in the cross. Oh! Cross, my dear Cross..." (April 25, 1859). "…our gain and our treasure lie in the Cross; how precious it is to suffer for Jesus on the Cross. For the love of such a dear Spouse, do not let suffering slip away. Study well the way to suffer without anyone knowing…" (February 4, 1863). "Our destiny is assured if the love of the Cross dwells in our hearts"—a love that makes the burden light and sweet; a love that does not count the cost, is never afraid, and does not retreat before anything or anyone; a love that makes it possible to "suffer in silence, suffer while working, suffer joyfully, or at least with patience"!

Love makes incredible things possible; it harmonizes contrasts, reconciles opposites—even pain and joy!

This goal is our resurrection, the fruit of our fidelity to Jesus, who chose us to be Adorers of His Blood, giving us trust and deigning to entrust us with the continuation of His work: to love the Father and to love the world, washing away its sin with our blood.

4. I Am in a hurry

"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Go; take no purse, no bag, no sandals, and greet no one along the way..." (Lk 10:2–4), because the urgency of the Kingdom allows for no delays or procrastination, justifies no selfish precautions, and tolerates no deviant legalism!

This sense of haste, of evangelical simplicity, is evident in Maria De Mattias's brief writing; it summarizes a multitude of topics dear to the

foundress, yet touches on them only briefly, in passing, until the final admission: “I am in a hurry. Maria De Mattias.”

She begins thus: “Adapt to local customs and teach the doctrine to the poor women of Jesus Christ after the Hail Mary.”

About two centuries ago, Maria recommended inculturation as an obvious and indisputable choice. The apostle evangelizes by immersing himself in the realities of different places, becoming a citizen of the world! A woman of the Spirit, she dared to do the unthinkable for her time, convinced that she “must obey God” and not the traditions, customs, and structures of the time—which were limiting and stifling: the Kingdom of God comes first!

Having laid this cornerstone, Maria points us to the source of her clarity and determination: the Blood of Jesus!

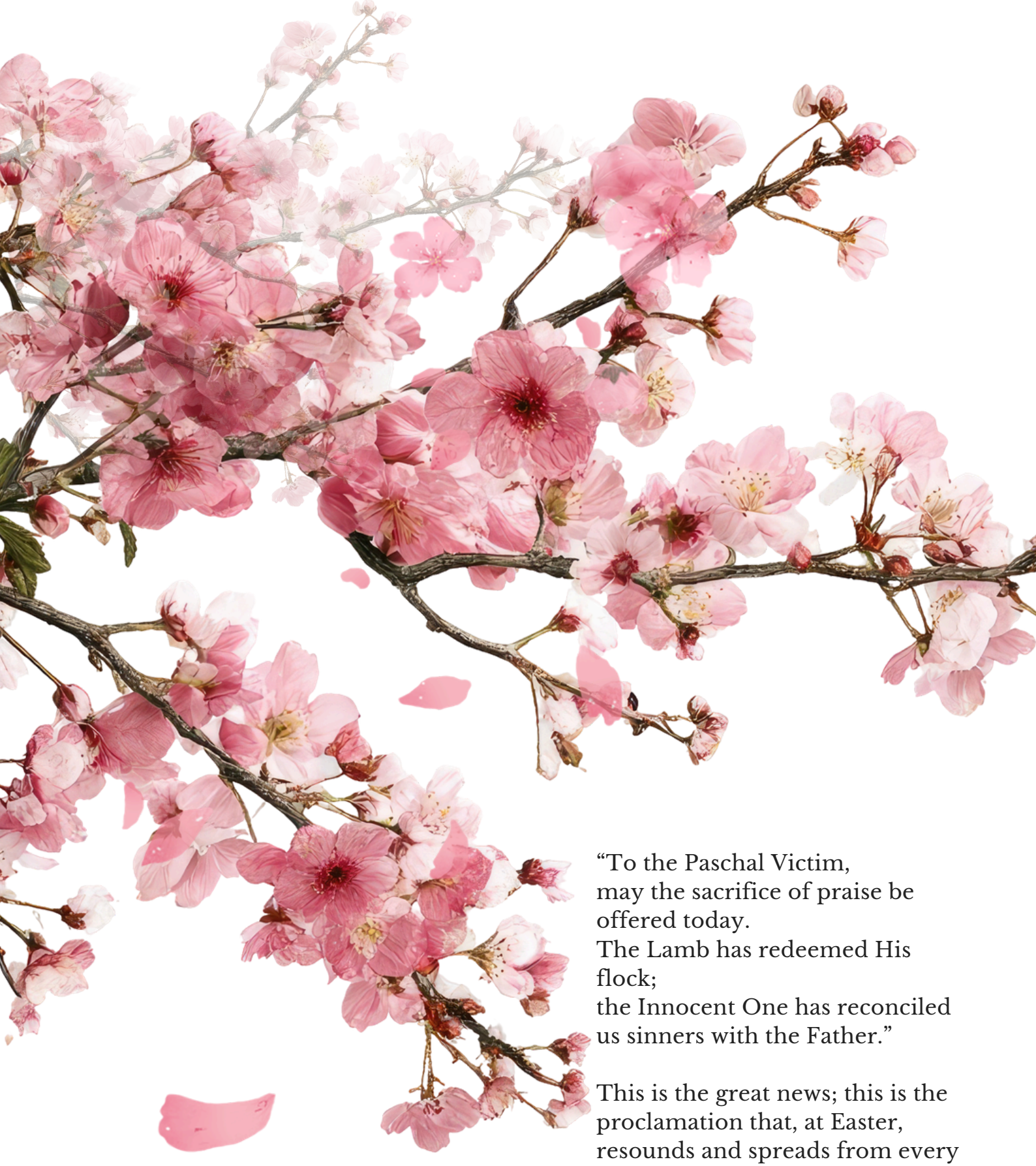
“The voices of that adorable Blood shed with such love and such pain” become a driving force, motivation, courage, and freedom. Knowing Jesus and his Blood leaves one no longer at peace; it sets one in motion, inspiring ideas and plans, for Maria writes: “My heart is torn with sorrow because I am not able to save all the souls of my neighbor.” (Letter 1/17/1857) . For this reason, again according to Maria De Mattias, “we need those among us who are filled with zeal to save souls for Jesus. We need those who adapt to both good and evil. They must adapt to all kinds of food...”—that is, they must know how to incarnate themselves everywhere, like Jesus, the God of heaven, who is wonderfully integrated into our human condition here on earth!

This readiness and flexibility must always characterize us as Adorers of the Blood of Christ, right from the start: “Tell the novice to become holy quickly”—that is, to live out her charism of love for Jesus and for her “dear neighbor,” and to strive for the salvation of souls without delay, without putting it off. The sign of our call to this Institute is precisely the creativity of charity that gives wings to our hearts and feet and spurs us on to make the love of the crucified Jesus known to all, using “every possible means, and these at all times” (Letter, Dec. 6, 1838).

I’m in a hurry! Today, when so many pressures might push us toward resignation, demotivating us and offering us even convincing excuses to justify pessimism, this call from Maria—and not only in this letter—opens us to renewed vitality, reinvigorates our love for Jesus the Redeemer, and dispels our fears: “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Perhaps

tribulation, anguish… old age, or illness? Nothing will ever be able to separate us from the love of God!" (Rom 8:25–29).

Here we are, then, like the Foundress—women on the move, on the paths of the world, alongside every person, free and lighthearted, resourceful and tireless, holy in our eagerness to inspire everyone and everything with our experience of being redeemed, and to make "the praise of the Blood of Jesus resound everywhere."!



“To the Paschal Victim,
may the sacrifice of praise be
offered today.
The Lamb has redeemed His
flock;
the Innocent One has reconciled
us sinners with the Father.”

This is the great news; this is the proclamation that, at Easter, resounds and spreads from every Christian congregation.

In Christ, our hope, communion and love are reborn

We, the "family of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ," mindful in the Spirit—by virtue of the calling with which He has endowed us—of the high price (1 Cor 6:20) paid by Jesus for our redemption, are, in the Church's great Easter liturgy, the schola cantorum, the singers of Jesus the Redeemer, the Paschal Lamb, the innocent Lamb who marked the lintel of our house with His Blood (Ex 12:23)—the house of "every tribe, tongue, people, and nation," that is, the world—and therefore "is worthy to receive power and wealth, wisdom and strength, honor, glory, and blessing" (Rev 5:12).

The Lord Jesus, through His Blood—the "expression, price, and measure of His love for us"—has wiped out our sin (Rom 6:6); He has trampled our sins underfoot, cast them into the depths of the sea (Mic 7:19), restored the beautiful order of things (MDM), reconciled heaven with earth and earth with heaven (Col 1), made us His brothers, brothers to one another, children of the one Father, heirs of the Kingdom!

We cannot help but burst forth in a "sacrifice of praise," in a hymn of blessing, gratitude, and celebration:



"All you peoples, clap your hands,
acclaim the Lord with a voice of joy
and gladness,
for the Lord, exalted and great,
has shown us his mercy...
Sing hymns to Jesus,
celebrate the memory of his holiness,
for he loved us and washed us with his Blood
and became our help and our Redeemer.
May the Blood of Christ be blessed forever
for he has done wondrous things for us.
May Jesus be blessed forever
and may heaven and earth be filled
with the glory of His Blood" (MDM).

The sequence then continues, introducing us—in language that, from a human perspective, defies logic—to the incredible and inexpressible reality of the Resurrection:

"Death and Life faced off
in a wondrous duel.
The Lord of life had died;
but now, alive, He triumphs."

The Redeemer fought a hard battle against sin, which is death. He fought to the point of death—death by crucifixion, death with the complete shedding of His Blood—but He did not remain in the tomb...

"Why do you seek the living among the dead?
He is not here; he has risen" (Lk 24:5–6);
"Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Cor 15:54–55)

We, who believe in Jesus the Redeemer, have this joyful certainty—what we in the Christian tradition call hope: "the hope through which God has regenerated us by the resurrection of Jesus" (1 Pet 1:3).

A joyful, selfless certainty that calls us to take on the responsibility to struggle, like Jesus, in our own time and circumstances, so that sin—which still marks humanity and causes it to groan and suffer—may continue to be "nailed to the cross" (Col 2:14)—our cross this time—so that we may help others enter into hope, celebrate Jesus and his Passover, and receive the gift of new life in his Blood.

“I rejoice in the sufferings I endure for you, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the Church” (Col 1:24), Paul says this for us as well.

Each of us, “the family of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ,” is called in some way, after “washing our garments in the Blood of the Lamb,” to become, in turn, blood that washes away the sins of others. “Jesus, the great Son of God, endured the harsh death on the cross to save souls. He, with infinite condescension, calls us to assist him...” (Letter no. 473).

By virtue of the charism that distinguishes us within the Church, “we participate in the Redeemer’s struggle against the power of darkness and sin, to share in his victory” (LC 25); let us, in other words, “be weak with him so that his strength may be made perfect in us” (2 Cor 12:10)! In the Spirit, let us prepare ourselves to “endure to the point of shedding blood in our struggle against sin” (Heb 12:4).

This is our mission, our true mission: “to portray and reflect the most vivid image of God’s love”—a love that the Blood of Jesus expresses and embodies. To portray: that is, to learn well from the Spirit the lesson of Jesus, “the atoning sacrifice for our sins and for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2).

To reflect: that is, to put into practice and bring to life in our own way what we have learned, to become, with Jesus and in his place, a Paschal victim, offering him our blood so that He—who gave all of his own—may know where to draw from in order to continue cleansing the world: “Just as He gave his life for us, so too must we give our lives for our brothers and sisters” (John 3:16).

This is Christian love—the love that changes the world, that brings about peace, reconciliation, and communion among us, between us and God, and among all people.

This is the love that is rekindled at Easter, and we, the “Family of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ,” find our purpose when—and to the extent that—we become its sign, its bearers, and its promoters: The Mission then continues through oral storytelling and proclamation:

“Tell us, Mary:
What have you seen of life?
The tomb of the living Christ,
the glory of the risen Christ,

and the angels who witnessed it,
the shroud and his garments:
Christ, my hope, has risen,
and goes before you to Galilee."

"Tell me, too," Jesus says to us. Be leaven of hope yourselves as well. Yes, I died, but now I live and go before you on all the roads of the world. Do not think of me as still in the tomb, and help others, too, not to give in to sadness and pessimism.

"Woman, why are you weeping?" (Jn 20:15). "O foolish ones, and slow of heart… Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Lk 24:25–26).

With Jesus, "the Crucified Redeemer, who died and rose again in glory" (Letter no. 858), the world has entered into a perpetual feast in which all participate who "let their hearts burn within them" (Lk 24:32) through their encounter with Jesus, the risen Redeemer. "But how can so many hearts burn if no one tells the story? How can there be a celebration for the immense multitude from every tribe, language, people, and nation if no one goes out to proclaim it?

For this reason: how beautiful are the feet of the members of the Family of the Most Precious Blood who, as experts in Jesus the Redeemer, everywhere and always, in every situation, bring the good news" (cf. Rom and Rev)!

Let us shout it out loud, let us tell everyone: "God, rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our sins, made us alive together with Christ. With him he also raised us up and seated us in the heavenly realms" (Eph 2:4–6)!

News like this can be reported properly only by excellent journalists, by Witnesses and Prophets. That is why I turn to Don Tonino Bello for help: "I would so much like Mary to lend us her words here to sing of our joy and our hope.

Brothers and sisters, do not let yourselves be terrified by the wickedness of the times, by the tumbling of the world which, at times—using the terminology sociologists employ—is presented to us as if on the very brink of the abyss, as a mass of the damned rather than, on the contrary, as a gathering of the saved. Never tire of being unrelenting bearers of wisdom among the people.

The world will turn out all right; don't worry. Ever since Jesus rose from the dead, we no longer need to be afraid. Take heart. We are the special guests of the Risen One, drunk with joy. I say this emphatically: drunk!

Sing us some very different songs! It wasn't a sacristan who said that. It was Nietzsche who said it. Sing us very different songs of resurrection, because the songs you sing—not those of the choirs—are very sad...

They even said it to Saint Peter: "You are drunk." It's a shame that no one tells us today that we are drunk. Because we live without wonder! What kind of risen ones are we?

Take heart, then, for Easter bursts upon us. It is the day when boulders roll away from the entrances to the tombs. It is the interweaving of messages of liberation brought by women panting after long runs. It is the jubilation of news that we feared might never arrive, and which spreads from mouth to mouth, forging new bonds among old friends. It is the joy of the Risen One's appearances that sparks embraces in the Upper Room. It is the celebration of those once disillusioned by life, in whose hearts hope suddenly surges."

"Yes, we are certain of this:
Christ has truly risen"
and we do not want to be left out,
mere spectators of the
greatest and most significant event in history.
Let us set out on our journey...
"a peaceful yet overwhelming multitude
led by the Risen One" (D. Fabbri).
Let us repeat it to everyone: Christ is truly risen!
and
"You, victorious King,
always bring us your salvation."
Amen. Alleluia!