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A RUNNING HEART

1. A CONSUMING THIRST

*In her, zeal was like a consuming thirst.*¹ This was how Mother Marie Joseph de Casteras described the zeal of Adele, her cousin and our Foundress. It was a characteristic also stressed by her mother, who nurtured in Adele the qualities for a life of charity and apostolic zeal. Moreover, this is highlighted in a brief message that the baroness of Trenquelléon writes to Father Chaminade, shortly after the death of Adele. She points out: *Elle avait tant de zèle sur la terre!* She had so much zeal on earth! And, this is without a doubt, the most outstanding characteristic of *chère Adèle*, as all her friends referred to her in the early years at the beginning of the association.

The Synod on the New Evangelization, held last October, would surely have filled the heart of Adele with joy, enthusiasm, and new missionary zeal. As I read the message of the Synod on the New Evangelization, I tried to read it with the eyes and heart of Adele; I could not hide my excitement when I read: ... *we wish to indicate to all the faithful two expressions of the life of faith which seem particularly important to us for witnessing to it in the New Evangelization.*

The first is constituted by the gift and experience of contemplation. A testimony that the world would consider credible can arise only from an adoring gaze at the mystery of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, only from the deep silence that receives the unique saving Word like a womb. Only this prayerful silence can prevent the word of salvation from being lost in the many noises that overrun the world. [...]

The other symbol of authenticity of the new evangelization has the face of the poor. Placing ourselves side by side with those who are wounded by life is not only a social exercise, but above all a spiritual act because it is Christ's face that shines in the face of the poor.

*We must recognize the privileged place of the poor in our communities, a place that does not exclude anyone, but wants to reflect how Jesus bound himself to them. The presence of the poor in our communities is mysteriously powerful: it changes persons more than a discourse does, it teaches fidelity, it makes us understand the fragility of life, it asks for prayer: in short, it brings us to Christ.*²

Yes, the heart of Adele would have exalted.

¹ MERE M. JOSEPH DE CASTERAS, *Mémoires: Mlle de Trenquelléon avait, si l'on peut s'exprimer ainsi, une soif dévorant du salut des âmes, qui ne lui permettait pas de laisser échapper aucune occasion de s'y employer: entendait-elle la voix d'un pauvre qui demandait l'aumône? Vite, elle courait la lui porter elle-même, afin de joindre la spirituelle à la pécuniaire.*

²XIII ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, 7-28 OCTOBER 2012, *Message*, n. 12

The New Evangelization, for us today as in the past for Adele, must start from contemplation and from the poor, following the example of the One who first announced the year of grace and mercy to the poor:

*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me;
He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly,
to heal the broken hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the release of prisoners,
to announce a year of favor from the Lord. (Isaiah 61:1-2)*

Celebrating the enthusiasm of Adele and Chaminade, as we approach the anniversary of our Foundation, I would like to highlight some aspects.

2. THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME: REKINDLE THE GIFT OF GOD

New Evangelization is first and foremost about reviving the gift of God that is within us, as Saint Paul reminds us in writing to Timothy: "I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you". (2 Timothy 1,6) The elder Paul, now at the end of his earthly race, reminds his disciple Timothy to stir up the gift that the Spirit has put in his heart through the imposition of hands.

To rekindle the gift of God is to revive what naturally would fade, or to add wood to the fire not yet extinguished. It means to rekindle what may be turned off in the maze of life, because of bad weather and the often unexpected waves which rock the boat of our existence, when we are at the mercy of human ups and downs.

Relight the torch, to use a term dear to our Founders, is rekindle the passion for the Lord, the love with which He has seduced us long ago.

Our lives are not simply to have things to do and roles to play. In the Christian life, and even more so in religious life, there is a decisive passion for the Lord. The love for the Lord is certainly different in the various stages of life, in our youth, in maturity, and in old age, but it must be always present and always shine brightly.³

The zeal of Adele was born from the contemplation, was born from the love for Christ, from a passion for Him loved above all else.

Her love for God made her sensitive to all that interested in his glory. The joy shone on her face when they spoke of the success of any work that would help to bring it about. From her love for God was born this all-consuming zeal for the salvation of souls, being ready to go to the ends of the earth to save one soul. "Let us love God, let us love God, she repeated with ardor to her daughters, to the pious people with whom she was in contact."⁴

³ L. Manicardi, *La vita religiosa: radici e futuro*, EDB, Bologna 2012, 133.

⁴ Madre M. J. De Casteras, *Memoires: Son amour pour Dieu la rendait sensible à tout ce qui intéressait sa gloire. La joie rayonnait sur son visage quand on lui parlait de la réussite de quelque œuvre qui devait contribuer à la procurer. De son amour pour Dieu naissait ce zèle consommant pour le salut des âmes, elle eut voulu aller au bout du monde pour contribuer à en sauver une seule. Faisons aimer Dieu, faisons aimer Dieu, disait-elle dans un saint transport à ses filles, aux personnes pieuses avec qui elle se trouvait en rapport.*

3. HE HAS SENT ME TO ANNOUNCE GOOD TIDINGS TO THE AFFLICTED

3.1 Running to Open to the Poor.

For Adele in the aftermath of the revolution, new evangelization was born from contemplation to reach out to the poor. For Adele, evangelization was nourished in the silence of prayer in the chapel of the chateau, while following the rule of life that shaped her life from the age of 16. She had the face of the poor ... a face that never tired of trying to comfort, to help in ways both physical and spiritual. The love of Christ in her was an inexhaustible source of zeal, initiative, and apostolic ardor that moved her hands and her feet in search of the poor, looking for those whom the revolution had left in material and spiritual misery, without hope and without faith.

We always read in the *Memoirs* that Adele ran when she perceived the arrival of a poor person to the chateau.⁵ She ran to the door, ran to offer what the family always held in reserve for the poor. She hurried, but not just to give. She initiated a dialogue. She tried to get to know those who stood before her, their situation, their family, and invariably realizing the spiritual poverty the person was in. And as a result, her school at the chateau grew in number with new students.

Even after Adele founded the Congregation, to teach the poor remained one of her favorite activities. It is said that an aspirant showed up, already of a certain age and without a dowry. She was about to be refused, but it was enough to say to the Foundress that this person had a special talent for teaching the poor, and the refusal turned into a full and joyful acceptance of the new vocation.⁶

Adele ran to open the door to the poor. She felt it a privilege to do so.

It is a running of those like Peter and John, who ran to the tomb at dawn on the day of the Resurrection. It is running with the heart, more than it is a physical exercise. It is an interior disposition which, while it may vary in its external expression with age, is always expressed as one is more attuned to go out of oneself, and to open oneself to the needs of others.

For the younger ones among us, it will also mean physically running when it comes to responding to a request for help, to a service, promptness in accepting the other, in the tidying up of what is out of place without being noticed. It can mean doing something before being asked, even sparing someone else the humiliation of having to ask for a service ... but doing it before they ask, doing it in silence and without recognition. It can mean preparing things that may please the community, that bring joy, happiness, and enhance the serenity and beauty of living together.

For older ones among us, to have a heart that runs means attention to others, to what they do, to what worries them and occupies them. It will mean to always offer a smile even when you have not slept well; it will mean not to turn in on one's own aches and pains but to offer a serene presence, a presence that offers to those in front of you support, comfort, understanding. It will mean taking the time to listen, becoming pillars of the community and the congregation with a life that is offered in joy and in

⁵ *Memoires, op. cit.*

⁶ *Memoires, op. cit.*

suffering patiently to the end. In an unforgettable speech, Benedict XVI had this to say: *The center of the church is not where it is organized. It is where people pray.*

The center of the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate is not Rome, nor Agen. It is where sisters pray. It is where there is a running heart filled with love, a love that gives of itself without stopping in any situation, to the last breath, and with certainty to cooperate in the mission of Mary.

Also, our brothers, sisters, friends, neighbors ... they run. Today more than yesterday. Just go to the subway of a major city or the train station, and you come home dazed. People run. One runs because of competitiveness, at all levels, forcing you to inhuman rhythms. In today's world, even when you are sitting in front of a computer or behind the wheel of any vehicle, it is the mind, in most cases, that runs so rampant and unabated. It is not the heart.

In Adele, and in Chaminade, each with a running in the heart, there was an ardent zeal, all-consuming, to know, love and serve Jesus through Mary.

Well suited to Adele are the words of the Psalm: *I will run the way of your commandments, for you have opened my heart. (Ps. 119:32)*

3.2 Going Out in Search of the Poor

Adele did not only "opened the door". She did not limit herself to wait at home for those who knocked at the door of the chateau.

She went out looking for them. Every Sunday when the family went to the parish for Mass by riding in the carriage, the way that Adele invariably chose was to walk, as an opportunity for meetings, dialogues, new friendships, always with the aim to rekindle the flame of faith in the hearts of those she encountered.

The precious time for Adele was all aimed at "her missionary effort". The walks were the truly "missions". What makes one smile was the trick her sister and her two cousins used,⁷ when they want to go out for a walk. Knowing that to go out for simple relaxation would not appeal to Adele, they would tell her: *Adele, let's go on mission.* Adele smiled at their expedient means to an end, and the group left for the real "missions", from time to time exploring new paths, moving into new areas to meet the poor, the families of the neighborhood, servants, shepherds, who had never before heard of Communion, Sacraments, etc. ... The word of Adele was lively, attractive, convincing. And many of them began a real journey of faith, on a path passing through the heart of the tireless Adele.

3.3 To Search For New Missionaries

The zeal of Adele did not just cause her to run to open to the poor, or merely to go in search of the poor, working with her hands offering concrete means to help them. There were not only just the poor on her horizon of inexhaustible charity. There were missionaries to look for, to get them to be

⁷ Among them Elizabeth, the future Mother Marie Joseph de Casteras, author of the *Memoires*, daughter of a maternal aunt of Adele. Elizabeth was orphaned and lived at the castle.

involved, to be enrolled in the first small Association and then in the Institute. The search for new companions, for new apostles to be involved in the mission, was at the heart of the apostolate of Adele as were the poor.

Adele and Chaminade had a common goal, even before they knew each other, to find, gather and form apostles, missionaries to rekindle the flame of faith, in order to multiply Christians.

With regards to the pastoral care for vocations, and the search for new missionaries and apostles of Mary, one finds in the zeal of Adele and Chaminade new ideas, new and enthralling motivation to implement a vocational pastoral that is personal and communal, creative, courageous, confident and steady.

4. ... TO BIND UP THE BROKENHEARTED

We are to bind up the broken hearted, those with shattered hearts, those disappointed and embittered. The deep economic crisis that we are experiencing, and of which we still do not see an end, is a wider crisis that involves the whole sphere of existence, a crisis of values which is reflected in all areas: human, family, professional, political, economic ...

Our techno-liquid modernity, as the experts call it, is a society that produces profound changes, even wounds the human condition.

These are personality weakness, a lack of reference values, egotism and latent self-interest. How many broken hearts in the swirling pace of today often try in vain, to unravel an existential knot tangled more day by day?

Men and women:

- With marriages and relationships increasingly fragile
- With more than a past divorce; tangled in a second or third separation
- With economic instability, loss of job, often being forced to move, to immigrate
- With new neurosis and mental illness
- Where life has taken away prematurely a spouse, a child, a loved one
- Living the drama of loneliness, aging, and often unconsciously awaiting death in modern and sophisticated "Hospices", or in the solitude of an apartment ...

These are men and women with broken hearts. The New Evangelization sends us to bind up the brokenhearted. In relations with others we must not forget that we often find ourselves facing people whom life has not only injured, but someone whose heart is deeply wounded. And if there is a wound not cured, it is because the wound has not received the necessary attention.

The wound should be treated more appropriately, with greater delicacy, for a longer time of care, with waiting, service, and patience.

To bind up the brokenhearted requires great amounts of listening, comforting, and sometimes, simple patient silence.

This all requires an inventive charity, so that one can find from time to time the remedies best suited to one's brother, sister, and to those who stand before us. Following the example of Adele, one should not just wait at the door of our communities for a brother or a sister, but go in search of them.

5. ... TO PROCLAIM LIBERTY TO CAPTIVES ... TO PROCLAIM THE YEAR OF THE LORD

New Evangelization means to preach God's copious mercy that spreads over humanity, to all those who embark on the journey back to the father's house.

The young son in the Lucan parable is not only the image of that individual, or each of us. It is the image of humanity that has moved away from the Father, to quench a thirst for pleasure, self-realization, self-exaltation outside of rule and limit, a thirst that invariably leaves one more thirsty and hungry than ever before.

Hope helps us perceive the hand of providence in the times in which we live, the time to reflect within ourselves, with the opportunity to remember and find again the way that leads to the Father's house.

Recently, I have heard from different people many times, almost a cry: *That's enough!* It is even on the occasion of the election of Pope Francis that the chorus is heard, a planetary hope, seeing in him the boost that the world needs to rediscover the path of simplicity, tenderness, purity, poverty, rising from the mire in which humanity seems to be falling, just like the prodigal son who had found himself sharing the mud and the food of swine. Then he came to his senses ...

Preceded, accompanied, and supported by the mercy which we have and have experienced, we are invited to be witnesses of the God who saves, forgives, embraces, and bandages their wounds, pouring the oil of tenderness and mercy. We are invited to accompany this "return to oneself", with intelligence and wisdom, by putting in action that feminine delicacy, that sensitivity that distinguishes us.

Adele, conquered by Christ, held fast to the Word of Life, ran towards the goal and the Day of Christ, able to brag that she had not run in vain, nor labored in vain. (cf Philippians 2:16)

The next May 25th be a day of thanksgiving and intercession.
Let's ask for each other an ardent heart, a *running heart*.

Together with the General Council, I wish you all a joyful and fruitful Anniversary.

Sr. M. Frances Zomba, FMI

Superior General