

**C.Ss.R.**

# PIRITUALITY

ONE BODY (Eph 4,4)

UN SOLO CORPO (Ef 4,4)

UN SEUL CORPS (Eph 4,4)

UN SOLO CUERPO (Eph 4,4)

JEDNA WSPÓLNOTA (Ef 4,4)

UM SÓ CORPO (Ef 4,4)

EIN LEIB (Eph 4,4)

ΕΙΝ ΓΕΙΒ (Εβρ 4,4)

## 03 – SENT TO PREACH

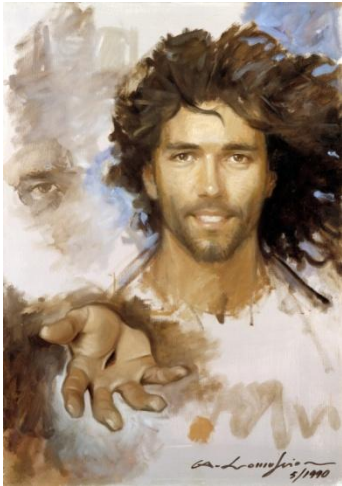
*Of possible symbols, preference should be given to the Bible, with flowers or a candle.*

*The prayer meeting begins with a greeting by the presider and a prayer, followed by a song.*

### *The News that counts*

When defining the theme of the sexennium, the first concern of the XXIV General Chapter was **“to preach the gospel”**.

In a world that thrives on **news**, we Redemptorists dedicate our lives to that news upon which all other news depends. This morning’s news will already be forgotten by tonight. But we have been entrusted with that news which has existed from the beginning of time, spanning human history and sustaining it: the story of a God who most wonderfully created us in his own image, and in an even more marvelous way has renewed and redeemed us (*from the Liturgy of Christmas*).



Fair indeed is our inheritance (Ps. 16:6), wonderful our vocation. We are called to speak a **different** word. Among the many proposals for happiness, into our sower’s hands has been entrusted the gospel: the offer of a good, beautiful and successful life, an eternal life.

The beauty of our vocation is already in the name we bear. **Redemption** is such great a task. God did not hesitate to be formed in human flesh. Redemption begins from the negative. It means to free all humanity from whatever oppresses it: injustice, suffering, sin. But its final goal is the joy of knowing God, the experience of his love, the surrendering of oneself to his Providence.

Within the magnificent mission of the Church, the good news of **mercy** is entrusted to us Redemptorists. There are different ways of reading the Gospel. At times, through the centuries, it has been used to kill, sometimes to condemn to being burnt at the stake in the city square or to hell. We Redemptorists are also guilty of wielding the crucifix like a club.

Our mission is beautiful and **difficult**. We must preach the infinite goodness of God and, at the same time, the urgency of conversion, the generous heart of the Father and the narrow gate of the Kingdom. We would be tempted to give up, if our strength were not from God; and if we did not know that the world needs this news as much as it needs bread.

Our strength is in the **Word**. And what power has a word! It enters an ear, passes through the mind, invades the soul and moves a body, rousing it to love or to fight. But how much more powerful is the Word of God! It brightens dark moments, changes the course of a life and creates the difference between magic and sacrament. It begets new life, forgiveness, inner strength, the Eucharist, a covenant of faithfulness, service and provides for the journey into eternity.

### *Your Word is a light for my steps*

*After a song and a simple gesture to venerate the Word, **Lk. 4:40-44** is read.*

*A reflection may follow, keeping in mind that:*

- In this passage Luke offers us a first portrait of Jesus, together with the **"schedule" of his daily life**. These are the most important elements: the struggle with the evil one, the healing, the desert, but above all the awareness of his **mission**. He must move on to other cities and synagogues. His

passion for the Kingdom devours him. For this he has come.

- Everything takes place from sunset to the first light of day. The **night** is the image of the void, of inactivity; it foreshadows death. At other times, Jesus dedicates the night to prayer. Here, too, he seeks the desert. However, at dusk he heals the sick and casts out demons, and at dawn cannot escape the crowd looking for him. Night is the place of man's impotence and God's activity.

*A moment of silence follows.*

### **From Redemptorist tradition**

The friendship between **Saint Alphonsus** and Blessed Gennaro M. **Sarnelli** bloomed in the urgency of mission. In this friendship we can see the two main arteries that pumped blood into the entire history of the Congregation: preaching, as well as attention to the concrete needs of people.

Both were convinced that the **Gospel** was the only truth about life, at the service of people's integral well-being. Both volunteered for work at the Hospital for Incurables. As lawyers, both experienced the difference between legal codes and conversion of the heart. Once priests, they worked out a missionary methodology, beginning with the Evening Chapels. They had many missionary experiences in the city and the kingdom of Naples, encountering many forms of abandonment.

Alphonsus and Gennaro worked in a Church where religious ignorance fostered paganism, superstition, corruption in society and family violence. They perceived that ordinary pastoral care was not enough. Nor was extraordinary pastoral care within a penitential type of popular mission the solution. People needed help to persevere in their conversion. They needed to experience a loving God. Thus their **missionary pastoral work** evolved into guiding people on the journey to holiness, the true and authentic desire of every person.



This is the great, exhausting work that Blessed Sarnelli achieved with **catechesis**. This is the ever more evident role that the **devout life** occupied in the pedagogy of Alphonsus.

Thus is born the Redemptorist **popular mission**, a model for ministry that in time would assume other forms. But in the beginning the founding pillars were: preaching, "popular spirituality", personal attention to people, education about prayer, mental prayer in common, the rejection of a "central mission" that would not permit preaching in the small villages and most remote areas, the establishment of confraternities, the printing of simple, practical booklets and singing. Then the local Redemptorist community prolonged the mission by welcoming people and organizing retreats for the clergy and nobility, key people for the transformation of customs.

Thus was begun a **history**, charged with the same missionary energy. We remember St. John **Neumann**, who from the beginning was entrusted with the region north of Buffalo, New York, a vast area about 900 miles across, where the next closest mission was two hours away, and the farthest was up to twelve hours away by horseback. But this was, in fact, just the beginning. After becoming a bishop, Neumann found himself entrusted with a diocese of 35,000 square miles, all of which he sought to visit, taking to heart every Christian who was a member of his flock.

This is not simply a story from the past. Redemptorists continue the same history today.

### **The Constitutions today**

If our vocation is to "follow the example of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, by preaching the word of God to the poor" (Const. 1), then we must become aware of this risk: to worry so much about the poor that we overlook the Gospel.

In recent times, Redemptorists have been primarily concerned about those to whom we are sent. Restructuring is also intended take us in search of the poor and the abandoned. The General Directory for the Statutes of the Conferences gives top priority to those *to whom* we are sent, and second place to *the content* of evangelization (n. 6).

Perhaps history is asking us to reverse these priorities: to fix our eyes well (Hebrews 12:2) on **what Jesus** wishes to announce at this historical moment for the Church and the world.

Only with a genuinely **contemplative** gaze, together with **reflection** and sharing at different levels of the Congregation, we will be able to improve our ministry to the poor and abandoned. Are we not called to proclaim the Christ of **mercy** in a Church tempted by legalism? Should we not take the road of **simplicity** and closeness to the people in a Church tempted by triumphalism? If people only see the Church as **an institution**, should we not present our communities as places of hospitality and availability? Is not the aversion that many people feel toward the Church an appeal for greater **credibility** and integrity on our part? What language do we use and what pastoral choices do we make in order to help people encounter Christ as the **Redeemer**: that is, what principle of interior reconciliation, of peace in relationships, of conformity to the will of God, of joy and trust in the various stages of life? And what does the Redeemer have to say in the face of so many pervasive manifestations of **evil** today?

An increasingly common field for our mission today is to those who “no do not receive the message of the Church as **Good News**” (Const. 3). History asks us to be attuned to individual men and women of good will, with their path to happiness, often made crooked by sin. We are asked to give more attention to life than to books.

There is much we can and must do. We can begin with the **liturgy**, in which the Congregation gathers “to live the mystery of Christ and of salvation” (Const. 29). This is our starting point for a mission open to the world. We can already do much by the way we celebrate. This will give even more value to our preaching. For even today, “faith depends on hearing” (cf. Rm. 10:14, 17).

*If desirable, there can now be a simple sharing about this topic. It would also be opportune to make concrete, personal commitments and some proposals for the community.*

*A moment of silence and a song may follow.*

## Conclusion

*Let us pray with the words of Blessed Sarnelli:*

O God of mercy, Father of every consolation,  
you are and always will be a loving God,  
whether you respond at once to our petitions  
or satisfy them later.

O God of my heart,

I believe, confess and adore your ineffable perfection.  
How many times have I experienced your Providence!  
When it seems that you neglect our concerns;  
it is then that you assist us with even more love.

You pretend to be insensitive to our problems, deaf to our cries;  
you seem to sleep when the tempest rages,  
but you give us the strength to wrestle with the storm.

Thus you test our faith and our love.

O Providence, o eternal Wisdom, o admirable judgments of my God:  
Blessed be the Creator, whose mercy will never fail us  
as long as we raise our hearts to him by means of holy prayer. Amen.

[From the *Treatise on Prayer* in *The World Sanctified*]

*Conclude with an Our Father, a liturgical prayer, a blessing and a hymn to our Lady.*



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----- Translated by Joseph P. Dorcey cssr -----