



Rome, March 8, 2016

Prot. No. 0000 023/2016

Dear Sisters,

The approaching beatification of the Servant of God Maria Celeste Crostarosa your foundress (18 June 2016), is an impetus to write this brief letter to express my fraternal participation in your joy and thanksgiving to the Lord for so significant a gift. I am sure that every community is already committed to preparing to live deeply this event and to share it with the ecclesial communities in which they are situated. I heartily encourage these initiatives, especially those where the monasteries of Redemptoristines are located in the same region and with the collaboration of Redemptorists.

It is certainly a great joy for the entire Redemptorist family to see Mother Maria Celeste Crostarosa finally proposed to all the people of God as a model of holiness and as a merciful advocate. Above all for you, dearest sisters, this is because the beatification of your foundress is further confirmation of the evangelical nature and timeliness of the charism that she has passed on to you. It is necessary, therefore, that your joy and thanksgiving is transformed into a renewed commitment of creative fidelity to your vocation and mission in response to the current signs of the times.

The beatification takes place shortly after the conclusion of the special year of consecrated life. In the Apostolic Letter with which he began this celebration, Pope Francis had invited us to “look to the past with gratitude” so that we learn to “live the present with passion” and thus “to embrace the future with hope.” I believe that the forthcoming beatification must strengthen your commitment to this triple dimension.

We must continue to deepen the spiritual and community message of Mother Celeste, in order to draw on this stimulus and encouragement to discern and address, with the same confidence, the many challenges which the Order faces today. Then you can live your vocation and mission with grateful joy - as emphasized in your *Constitutions*, “the Father calls us today to be a living Memorial – a Viva Memoria – a constant Reminder – of all that the Son accomplished for our salvation during His life on earth. It is in this way that the Redeemer is able today to accomplish His work of salvation in us and through us.” (n. 5). And the joy of your fidelity will be a source of generous commitment for the future of your communities, despite all difficulties.

In a word, the beatification of Mother Celeste must be for the entire Order, for each monastery, for each of you - the feast of “creative fidelity”. In the words of St. John Paul II in



Vita Consecrata: “Institutes of Consecrated Life are thus invited courageously to propose anew the enterprising initiative, creativity and holiness of their founders and foundresses in response to the signs of the times emerging in today's world.” (n. 37).

The beatification is taking place while, with the whole Church, we have begun the Jubilee journey/pilgrimage of mercy. It is one more reason to give a clear and convincing witness to your vocation to be effectively the ‘living memory’ of the merciful love of the Father in Christ through the Spirit. In proclaiming the Year of Mercy, Pope Francis stressed: “The Church is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel, which in its own way must penetrate the heart and mind of every person. The Spouse of Christ must pattern her behaviour after the Son of God who went out to everyone without exception. In the present day, as the Church is charged with the task of the new evangelization, the theme of mercy needs to be proposed again and again with new enthusiasm and renewed pastoral action. It is absolutely essential for the Church and for the credibility of her message that she herself live and testify to mercy. Her language and her gestures must transmit mercy, so as to touch the hearts of all people and inspire them once more to find the road that leads to the Father. The Church’s first truth is the love of Christ. The Church makes herself a servant of this love and mediates it to all people: a love that forgives and expresses itself in the gift of one’s self. Consequently, wherever the Church is present, the mercy of the Father must be evident. In our parishes, communities, associations and movements, in a word, wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy.” (*Misericordiae vultus*, n. 12).

For Mother Celeste, this witness is the very *raison d’être* of your community. Just recall the preface of the *Rules*: “My creatures be mindful of my eternal love with which I have loved you. I am well pleased to choose this Institute, that it may be a ‘*viva memoria*’ to all people of the world, of all that it has pleased my only Son to work for their salvation in the space of the thirty-three years that he lived in the world as a wayfarer. And his works have life before me and are of infinite price.”

Your *Constitutions* urge you not only to be an ‘oasis of mercy’, but also to seek ways to enable others to experience it: “Our brothers and sisters who wish to reflect, pray and renew their spiritual lives in an atmosphere of silence and recollection, must be able to find in our monasteries, the house of prayer and peace which they need. Although materially separated from the world, we are also present in it by our witness and by our welcome. We become in reality a living and radiant presence of Christ. The enclosure which cuts us off from the world is an open door for those seeking God. Our silence is a word of salvation and our contemplation is a missionary activity.” (n. 47).

This requires that you will not tire of growing in loving intimacy with Christ. I wish that each of you renew in yourselves the decisive experience of Mother Celeste from her youth: “Thus said the Lord: ‘I want to be your guide, I want to lead you: look no further than me alone. *I will be your teacher: love no other creature but me*’” (Autobiography, Ch. III). Allowing the Spirit to make of her a ‘living animated portrait’ of Christ, every Redemptoristine must be able to repeat with Mother Celeste: “My beloved and my love was you alone. And on your breast I



am leaning, and leaning on my breast are spread a thousand graces of purity ... annihilating my own being, I place myself in the humanity of your divine Word” (Trattenimenti, IX). Thus to become a living Eucharist for the salvation of the world: “I went to Holy Communion and I was transformed into you, because I entered the humanity of your Divine Word and began to sacrifice myself to the Father” (*ibid*).

For Mother Celeste, this Eucharistic intimacy with Christ must be expressed in lifestyle and in the very structures of your communities. The ‘mutual love’ is the first and fundamental *rule*, in fidelity to the words of Christ: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.” (Jn 15.12 -13). The merciful giving of oneself must concern all of your life: “I came down from heaven to give all of myself to you and to give my life not only for my friends, but also for my enemies, to glorify my Father and for your salvation ... Therefore you will give to your neighbor all your soul: your intellect, raising it to my mercy for the benefit of the other ... your memory, with forgiveness from the heart so as not to remember offenses received ... the will, loving the other dearly ... your heart with its affections, sharing in afflictions, infirmities and hardships for love of me ... This will involve your body and your senses for the benefit of the other ... In short: your body and your life must be ready to be sacrificed, if charity requires it, for their eternal salvation, and as I have done, so also must you”.

The characteristic of your communities springs from this mutual love and self-giving, as your Constitutions recall: “The life of charity that we must live in our communities will often demand of us genuine abnegation. This will help us to free ourselves from the different forms of selfishness in order to think of others, in the actual living of daily life, which we must accept and live with simplicity and in a spirit of service” (n. 9). In this way “the constant contemplation of the mysteries of Christ will develop in us this mark of happy and radiant joy, of simplicity and true charity which we consider a characteristic of our community” (n. 10).

I am certain that even vocational difficulties can have a positive response if your communities will increasingly radiate this joy that springs from and is nourished by intimacy with Christ. I remind you of the words of Pope Francis in his letter for the year of consecrated life: “The consecrated life will not flourish as a result of brilliant vocation programs, but because the young people we meet find us attractive, because they see us as men and women who are happy!” (n. II/1).

Your brother in the Redeemer,



Michael Brehl, C.Ss.R.

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Superior General