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OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE  
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLIS

# BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 231014a

Saturday 14.10.2023

## **Audience with participants in the Conference on Scalabrinian spirituality organized by the Missionaries of Saint Charles Borromeo**

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the Conference on Scalabrinian spirituality organized by the Missionaries of Saint Charles Borromeo, to whom he delivered the following address:

### **Address of the Holy Father**

Dear brothers and sisters, welcome!

I greet you all, pleased to meet you at the end of the Convention on Scalabrinian spirituality. You have reflected on the Biblical verse: “I am coming to gather all nations and tongues” (*Is 66:18*), a theme that is very meaningful for your charism. Indeed, Saint John Baptist Scalabrini, who founded you as missionaries for migrants, taught you, in taking care of them, to consider yourselves brothers and sisters, *walking towards unity*, according to the heartfelt words of Jesus’ priestly prayer (cf. *Jn 17:20-23*).

Let us be clear: migrating is not a pleasant pilgrimage in communion; it is often an ordeal. And, just as every person the right to migrate, so too they have the right to be able to stay in their own land and live there in peace and dignity. Yet the tragedy of forced migrations caused by wars, famine, poverty and environmental hardship is there for all to see today. And this is precisely where your spirituality comes in: how do you dispose your heart towards these brothers and sisters? With the support of which spiritual path?

Scalabrini helps us, precisely by looking at the missionaries of migrants as cooperators of the Holy Spirit *for unity*. His is an enlightened and original vision of the migratory phenomenon, viewed as a call to create communion in charity. While still a young parish priest, he recounts finding himself, at Milan Central Station, in front of a mass of Italian migrants leaving for America. He recounts seeing “three or four hundred poorly dressed individuals, divided into different groups. On their faces [...] furrowed by the premature wrinkles that deprivation imprints on them, the turmoil of the affections that stirred their hearts at that moment was visible. [...] They were

emigrants [...] They were preparing to leave their homeland" (*L'emigrazione italiana in America*, 1888). These images are unfortunately familiar to us too. And the Saint, struck by that great misery, understood that there was a sign from God for him there: the call to assist those people materially and spiritually, so that none of them, left to themselves, would be lost, to lose their faith; so that they could come, as the prophet Isaiah says, to the holy mountain of Jerusalem "from all the nations as an offering to the Lord, upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon dromedaries" (66:20). Horses, chariots, sedan chairs, mules and dromedaries, to which we could add today boats, TIRs and barely seaworthy vessels; but the destination remains the same, Jerusalem, the city of peace (cf. Ps 122:3-9), the Church, the home of all peoples (cf. Is 56:7), where the life of each is sacred and precious. Yes, for Scalabrini this Jerusalem is the Catholic, that is, universal, Church; and she is such because she is "mother", because she is a city open to anyone seeking a home and a safe harbour.

And here there is a first appeal to us, to cultivate hearts that are rich in catholicity, that is, desirous of universality and unity, of encounter and communion. It is the invitation to spread a mentality of proximity – "proximity", this key word, is the style of God, who always makes himself close - a spirituality, a mindset of care and welcome, and to make "the civilization of love" grow in the world, in the words of Saint Paul VI (*Homily for the solemn closing rite of the Holy Year*, 25 December 1975). However, it would be somewhat utopian to claim that all this can be achieved by human forces alone. Instead, it is a matter of co-operating with the action of the Spirit, and therefore of acting in history under the guidance and with the energy that comes from God: of allowing ourselves to be conquered by his infinite tenderness to feel and act according to his ways, which are not always our ways (cf. Is 55:8), to recognize him in the stranger (cf. Mt 25:35) and to find in him the strength to love freely. The stranger. Let us not forget these three words from the Old Testament: the widow, the orphan, and the stranger. And this is an important thing in the Old Testament: the stranger.

And here is the second appeal that the Bishop Saint of Piacenza makes to us, when he insists on the need for the missionary to have a relationship of love with Jesus, the Son of God Incarnate, and to cultivate it especially through the Eucharist, celebrated and adored. I emphasize this word "adored". I think we have lost the sense of adoration. And we have prayers to do something or... beautiful prayers, but... in silence, adoring. The modern mentality has taken this sense of adoration away from us a little bit. Rediscover it, please, rediscover it.

We know how much Scalabrini loved Adoration, to which he devoted himself even at night, despite his tiredness from his exhausting work schedule, and which he did not renounce during the day, even in his busiest moments. He had no illusions: without prayer there is no mission! He said: "[Do not] allow yourselves to be led astray by a certain mad desire to help others, neglecting yourselves [...]. It is right that you make yourselves all things to all men; but [...] remember the Angels who in Jacob's Ladder ascended to God and descended to earth [...]. For you, too, are Angels of the Lord" (*Final address to the Diocesan Synod of Piacenza*, 4 September 1879). To ascend to God is indispensable to then know how to descend to the ground, to be "angels from below", close to the least: it is no coincidence that Jacob's ladder (cf. Gen 28:10-22) is depicted right in the centre of Scalabrini's episcopal coat of arms.

Therefore, dear sisters, dear brothers, here is an invitation to renew your commitment to migrants, and to root it increasingly in an intense spiritual life, following the example of your Founder. Along with this, though, I want to say a big thank you to you, a very big thank you for the great deal of work you do throughout the world! Since the times of Buenos Aires I am a witness to this work, and you do it so well. Thank you, thank you very much! Keep going, God bless you. And pray. And also, pray for me, because this "profession" is not easy!

[Hail Mary]

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