

ORIENTATIONS

**"On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee.
The mother of Jesus was there."**

At the wedding in Cana, Mary, the mother of Jesus, was there (Jn 2:1). "Moved by pity, the Second Vatican Council tells us, "she brought about by her intercession the beginning of the miracles of Jesus the Messiah." (LG 58). This shows us her role in the history of salvation at her Son's side, in the Church, yesterday and today. For us consecrated religious, Mary's presence is of fundamental importance "both for the spiritual life (...) and for the consistency, unity and progress of the whole community". (VC 28).

The Virgin Mary always had an important place in the life of Jean-Marie de la Mennais. He left us his example, together with a direct call for us to give her an important place in our lives as religious. This call is repeated throughout our history:

"You should have a deep devotion to the Immaculate Virgin because she is the Mother of God, a filial love because she is your Mother, and a boundless trust in her for the double reason that she is both the Mother of God and your Mother." (Rule of 1876).

1. Living out our consecration to Christ with Mary

Following in the footsteps of the Founders, Jean-Marie de la Mennais and Gabriel Deshayes, and of the Brothers throughout the history of the Congregation, we wish today **to strengthen our attachment to Mary** as mother and model in our lives as consecrated persons (VC 28).

1.1 Let us renew our consecration **to Jesus with Mary** in every situation, so that our lives as Brothers may be **beacons of hope**.

1.2 Let us rediscover the place of Mary in our following of Christ, in order to live with her our Mennaisian charism in all its dimensions.

1.3 Let us celebrate **a Marian Year** during which the Superior General will offer us a circular to help us live out the Rule of Life with Mary, the model of our consecrated life.

"They have no wine!"

At Cana, Mary turned to Jesus and explained to him the situation affecting all those attending the wedding: "They have no wine" (Jn 2:3). Through her intercession, she will lead her Son to radically transform this situation of lack and concern into a moment of grace, salvation, and life.

As a Congregation and as a Mennaisian Family, we experience over time fatigue, fears, fragility, sadness, indifference to the misery of others, lethargy, apathy, and unfaithfulness. We are few in number, we are affected by ageing and departures, we are saddened by the small number of vocations or in some cases their total absence. Our jars are empty!

Children, young people, and families live in a world affected by poverty of all kinds, by violence, war, and loneliness, by anxiety about the future of humanity and the planet, by a lack of meaning and an absence of hope.

Rule of Life

Ch. 1, N°4 - *To keep the strength of his initial impulse intact, the Brother often renews the joyful gift of his whole being. He asks the Holy Spirit to open his heart to this faith that makes him see the world, its people and events through the eyes of Christ.*

Jean-Marie de la Mennais

But when I cast my eyes over these pupils brought together by Providence, when I consider the immensity of the needs of this vast diocese, and compare them to its resources, my heart is saddened and broken, and I am tempted to say to Jesus Christ, like his apostles, in a similar circumstance, "How can such a small amount suffice for so many people?" (Quid haec inter tantos?)

2. Developing a compassionate heart

2.1 As Brothers, we should identify, accept, and even welcome our poverty, shortcomings, and weaknesses, in order to present ourselves to the Lord just as we are through the hands of Mary, in total humility and simplicity, trust and peace.

2.2 Despite our weakness, In this world at the school of Mary, let us open:

- **our eyes** that we might discover the needs of our Brothers, of the Mennaisian Family, of children and young people and of those around us
- **our ears** to hear the cries of all those who call out for help
- **our hearts** to empathize with the sufferings of those who carry a heavy cross
- **our hands** to serve those left by the wayside.

2.3 Together with Mary and following her example, carried by faith, **let us turn to Jesus** to present to him the frailties and infirmities of our brothers and sisters, especially the poorest and most destitute.

"Do whatever he tells you."

Mary recommended that the servants do whatever her Son tells them (Jn 2:3): let us listen to and put into practice the Word of the Lord.

This was the attitude she practised throughout her life. Jesus himself praised his Mother as one who listens to the Word and keeps it (Lk 11:28).

Following in Mary's footsteps, listening to and putting into practice the Word of the Lord involves us in a threefold movement: listening, discerning and acting.

Pope Francis

"We need to listen to the proclamation of the God who comes to us, to discern the signs of his presence, and to commit ourselves to his Word by walking in his footsteps. Listening, discerning, walking: three verbs for our journey of faith and for the service we perform..." (Pope Francis, 21/12/2023)

Rule of Life

Ch. 9, N°10 - *Following Mary's example, the Brother listens to the Word, treasures it, meditates on it in his heart and puts it into practice.*

3. Listening to and putting into practice the Word of the Lord

Above all, we are called **to listen to Jesus**. This implies a process of spiritual renewal so as to encounter him in prayer, reading and meditating on the Word of God.

3.1 In order to "start afresh with Christ", let us create **a climate of silence and interiority** in our communities that encourages an encounter with God, particularly in prayer and lectio divina, in order to welcome Christ and bring Him to the world.

3.2 Let us **practice discernment** personally and in community, as a Congregation and Mennaisian Family, that we might discover, through listening and dialogue, what the Lord expects of us and the paths we must follow in the Church and the world of today.

3.3 Guided by our **Rule of Life** that we read and meditate upon, **let us commit ourselves** to the path of love of God and of others, so that we might do what Jesus tells us in an attitude of availability and openness, generosity and total self-giving.

Today, as at Cana, **Jesus needs servants** so that his "hour" can come and his salvation be made manifest.

3.4 In our Provinces and Districts, let us find new ways to awaken and accompany Mennaisian vocations.

“Fill the jars with water”.

Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water" (Jn 2:7), and they filled them to the brim. Through the obedience of these servants to Jesus and their direct action, John the Evangelist offers us an example of service. Thereafter, Jesus would very often invite people to serve, right up to his last supper, when, by washing the disciples' feet, he showed himself to be a servant, thus demonstrating that he had not come to be served but to serve.

Following the example of Mary, the "Handmaid of the Lord", who crossed mountains and valleys to serve her cousin Elizabeth, we are invited to undertake a similar journey, to leave our comfort zones and go and serve wherever the Lord sends us.

Rule of Life

Ch. 8, N°14 - *Mennaisian education aims at promoting the whole person, body, spirit, and heart, and his or her fundamental dignity as a person in the image of God.*

Jean-Marie de la Mennais

"May the Lord make of you men after his own heart, devoted to his Church, detached from yourselves, poor in spirit, humble, zealous, ready to undertake anything and to suffer anything to spread his word, to extend his kingdom and to kindle in the world that divine fire which Jesus Christ came to bring." (S II, 549-550).

4. Calling us to be servants of hope

We are **called to service in the everyday events of our lives**.

4.1 In our communities, let us put ourselves **at the service of one another** in our daily lives, caring for one another and building true fraternity. Let us live a form of free and disinterested service so that we can welcome others and carry out our daily tasks with joy.

4.2 Called **to the service of educating** children and young people, let us manifest **in our educational communities** our readiness to help them, listen to them and support them by offering them an integral formation that involves the head, heart and hands.

4.3 **In the service of the least of all**, and following in the footsteps of our Founders, let us care for all those who face different kinds of poverty. Let us make our educational communities safe havens for young people, especially the most disadvantaged, those who need care and attention, who need a welcome and a listening ear.

"Now draw some out and take it to the Master of the feast."

After filling the jars with water, the servants were invited to draw some out and bring it to the host (Jn 2:8). But in doing so, they discovered that it was no longer water. It was excellent wine! Henceforth, the mission is to serve the Gospel and bring the joy of the Good News to others.

We are called to be witnesses of Gospel fraternity in a world that needs it more than ever. For us, the new wine is the joy of living together in fraternal communion. In doing so, we will be ones who call, we will be prophets and signs of the Kingdom of God.

By drawing the new wine and bringing it to the guests, the servants participated in the manifestation of Jesus as Christ and Saviour, and they did so together. They became missionary disciples, witnesses to the Gospel and the Kingdom of God. The wine is not meant to remain in the jars; it is to be distributed, enabling the wedding feast to take place, as a symbol of the covenant between God and humanity.

Rule of Life

Ch. 8, N°8 - *Following in the footsteps of Jesus, the Brother is a witness to universal fraternity. He makes his witness perceptible especially through the quality of his human relationships and the joy he radiates in serving God and His people.*

Jean-Marie de la Mennais

"Do not regard yourselves as profane teachers, but as missionaries charged with establishing the Kingdom of God in souls: this is indeed your vocation, and it is by making saints that you will sanctify yourselves..." (GC V, 209).

5. Sharing the good wine of Gospel fraternity

We are called to be **bearers of the Gospel and witnesses of fraternity**.

5.1 Let us share our experience of fraternity as Brothers through being **servants, pilgrims and prophets** of hope, and let us radiate this fraternity in our educational communities.

5.2 Let us **work for the development of the Mennaisian Family**, a sign of hope for children, young people and families. Let us live out together in our communities, fraternities and Mennaisian groups a spirituality of communion, manifesting our commitment to education, to the service of the poor and the proclamation of the Gospel.

5.3 Let us boldly pursue **our missionary activity**, by sending Brothers to live in international communities, carrying the wine of the Good News beyond the borders of our local realities and countries.