

In communion and gratitude, we recite the:

**Prayer to ask God's Blessing on the V Ordinary General  
Assembly of the Union**

January 24-27<sup>th</sup> 2018

Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
set our hearts on fire with your love, the love of Christ.

Renew your miracle of mercy in each one of us.

Bless the General Assembly of the Union.

Through your Spirit, may it be  
a profound experience of communion  
with You and with each other,  
of co-responsible discernment,  
of truly evangelical leadership  
in effective service of your Kingdom  
in the Church and in the world.

May it bear lasting fruit

for the concrete life and mission of the Union in our times  
according to the plans of your Heart.

We ask this through the infinite merits of Jesus Our Lord  
and through the unfailing intercession of Mary, Queen of  
Apostles,

St. Vincent Pallotti and Blessed Elisabetta Sanna, Josef Stanek  
and Josef Jankowski.

Glory be to You whose power working in us can do infinitely more  
than we can ask or imagine (cf. Eph 3:20). Amen

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# *Apostles for Today*

*Prayer and Reflection - December 2017 & January 2018*

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Two days before Christmas, among the cards on my desk, I chanced upon a fragment of poetry from Alda Merini<sup>1</sup>:

*“... And how to get to know your face,  
I will explain it to you:  
it is enough to see something  
that bears your imprint.  
And we are full of your imprints,  
as if you had passed through every home  
leaving invisible signs”.*

I would like to share this short text with you because it presents us again, in a nutshell, the entire message of Christmas, including what it affirms regarding human beings and what it requires of them. And also, it I think that it speaks in a clear way about our life and what is at the centre of our heart.

Jesus, the one long-awaited "by all peoples", has come and now, by His birth, everyone knows His face through every other neighbour, without distinction: in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did it to me (Mt 25:40).

I remember that as a young woman I was struck by the phrase that I had to repeat during the Christmas show performed with the companions of the community for friends and acquaintances:  
*it is Christmas every time you smile at somebody.*

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<sup>1</sup> Alda Merini (1931-2009), *Corpo d'Amore. Un incontro con Gesù, 2001 (Body of Love. An encounter with Jesus): “E come si fa a conoscere il tuo volto, te lo spiego io: basta vedere qualcosa che reca la tua impronta. E noi siamo pieni delle tue impronte, come se tu fossi passato in ogni casa a lasciare segni invisibili”.*

In putting this phrase into practice, I realised that I could not take it for granted or consider it easy, but had to ask Jesus each time to come down from heaven so that I could “lend” my smile to Him.

How can I ask him to come down again? How can I lend my smile to him?

By putting Love before everything and as the basis of everything. Because Love is everything in every vocation, condition, and situation of life. Saint Augustine, maestro of charity, strongly affirms: “All may sign themselves with the sign of Christ's cross, all may answer Amen, all may sing Alleluia, all may be baptized, all may come to church and line the walls of the basilicas. But there is nothing to distinguish the children of God from the children of the devil except unselfish love... If you do not have this one thing, nothing else is worthwhile. If you lack all the rest, have this, and you have fulfilled the Law ... ”.<sup>2</sup>

St. Thérèse of Lisieux also affirms: "Love of neighbour is everything on earth: we love God in the measure in which we put it into practice"<sup>3</sup>.

I had understood well that nothing can be done without charity being assured: one cannot go to work, study, sleep, eat, play or evangelise ..., not even pray, or participate in any liturgical action. The Gospel is very clear: "So then, if you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother or sister first, and then come back and present your offering"(see Mt 5: 23-24). Now many years have passed since that very young time of my life ... yet even now and with the same passion of those days, I

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE, Homilies on the 1<sup>st</sup> Letter of Saint John, Homily 5, vs. 7, (on 1 John 3:9–18), <http://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/npnf107/cache/npnf107.pdf>, p. 841.

<sup>3</sup> SAINT THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX, from the deposition of Mother Agnes of Jesus in P.A., Summarium, p. 275.

cannot go to sleep without having said to Jesus: "today I have loved you in this person, in that one, and again in that other person".

I must tell the truth: there are also many times when I say to him: "Today I have loved you little, indeed almost not at all, in this neighbour of mine, in that one, again in that other one"; but because of the imprint of St. Vincent Pallotti that is in me - as it is in every one of the Union - I am happy to feel my nothingness, so the All that is Jesus can enter into my heart and begin to truly love every person who crosses my path: "My God I am without charity: You are charity in essence ... My Jesus destroy all of my Life. Give me your Charity, and make me live, and be transformed into your Charity "(OCCC X, 674-5).

As a Pallottine family, we are bound, through our common spirituality, by a very strong bond, the strongest that can exist: "Charity exercised as the Apostle describes it forms all the substantial constituent of the pious Union; if this were lacking, the Catholic Apostolate would no longer be in it" (OCCC III, 137-138).

From the smallest to the greatest we know that it is worth living like this! We know that we are not made for half measures!

In a very short time (24-27 January 2018) we will live the important days of the V General Assembly of the entire Union. Each of us and all of us together will be called to open out our own hearts to He who knows how to fill them, in order to discern in communion and co-responsibility the path for the next three years.

From now on may we renew and strengthen even more between, if possible, the substantial constituent of charity, so that even as a single body, we can renew the miracle of the birth of Jesus for the Church and for humankind.

*Donatella Acerbi,  
Italy.*