Egon Färber MSF - Province in Germany

**The Holy Family - Model of our Life**

Conference in March 2020, in the jubilee year of the MSF

In the preface to our Constitutions is the following assertion:

**"The Holy Family is the model of the apostolate of the Missionaries of the Holy Family."** This statement has great significance for us Missionaries of the Holy Family, because it gives for us an essential orientation:

Our Congregation sees the Holy Family in their missionary its model.

The third article in the first chapter of our Constitutions is entitled:

"Our model: The Holy Family." It follows the fifth number of the Constitutions, which is well known:

*Fr. Berthier named our Congregation after the Holy Family whom he gave as our model. This model characterizes our spirituality.*

*In the Holy Family grew the Eternal Priest, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Missionary of the Father, to spread the light of the Gospel "to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death."*

*In the Holy Family, God's love for humanity is revealed. In it, the response of humanity to the gift of God found its clearest expression. The Holy Family by their common listening to the will of God and by the sharing of their gifts define our missionary life and task..*

 *Their union in God is a call to our religious community to foster fraternal unity, to promote human openness and hospitality, and at the same time to lead all into the one family of the Father.*

In this text is important to ascertain that Jesus Christ has grown in the Holy Family **to spread the light of the Gospel "to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death."** It means, that the vocation of the Holy Family of Nazareth is for all the service of redemption in Christ Jesus. In this sense the Holy Family is our example and defines our life and missionary work. We are called to accompany towards the Heavenly Father's family (Cost.2) especially those who are far from God.

There are four other numbers of our Constitutions and the General Directory, in which the example of the Holy Family is being proposed. Let's read:

*Our Founder refers us the Holy Family and calls it "The perfect model of unity of hearts, of mutual understanding, of obedience and of self surrendering for the good of others." (32 K).*

*Our lifestyle must be characterized by the spirit of the Holy Family. Fr. Berthier describes it as a "spirit of mutual respect, obedience, love for one's neighbor, a spirit of piety, humility, readiness to work, poverty and purity." (GD 011).*

*The Holy Family is the model of our spirit of prayer and our direction toward God (45 K).*

*... The example of the Holy Family, who said "yes" to God's call and responded to it with unconditional obedience helps us to better adhere to God's Will (24 K).*

These indications of our Constitutions show us the Holy Family as a radiant model **for our missionary service and for our life in religious communities.**

With regard to the example of the Holy Family, Father Berthier tells us one other major source. He writes in his book *Le Culte et l’Imitation de la Sainte Famille* (Paris-Grave 1906, p. 71):

*"Nothing expresses the faith of the Church better than its liturgical prayers. Nothing is therefore more capable of giving us just ideas on the worship of the Holy Family than Mass and the office in its honor approved by the Holy See."*

Really, in the liturgical texts of the Holy Family feast we find precious indications for the veneration and imitation of the Holy Family. This applies specifically to proper MSF’s liturgical texts approved by the Holy See: The votive Mass of the Holy Family and the mass and the texts of the Liturgy of the Hours of the feast of Our Lady of La Salette. I want to emphasize a Liturgy of the Hours, in which the example of the Holy Family text is interpreted for our time *(Office of Readings at the feast of the Holy Family, the second reading, the "Discourses" of Paul VI, Pope, speech in Nazareth, 5 January 1964):*

**The *home of Nazareth is*** *the school where we begin to understand the life of Jesus, that is*

***the school of the Gospel.*** *Here you learn to observe, to listen, to ponder and to penetrate the meaning so deep and so mysterious to this manifestation of the Son of God as simple, humble and beautiful. Perhaps we also learn, almost without realizing it, to imitate ...*

*Here, in this school, of course we understand why we have to keep the spiritual discipline, if we follow the doctrine of the Gospel and become disciples of Christ ...*

*In this house, the ever accomplished intelligence formation of the Gospel ...*

*Oh! silence of Nazareth, teach us to be resolute in good thoughts, intentions to the inner life, ready to understand clearly the secret inspirations of God and the exhortations of true teachers. Teach us how important and necessary are the preparation work, study, meditation, interiority of life, prayer, that God alone sees in secret ...*

*Finally, we learn the lesson of work.*

*Oh! home of Nazareth, house of the carpenter's Son! Here especially we wish to understand and celebrate the law, but some severe redeeming the human effort; Here ennoble the dignity of work so that it is felt by all.*

These words of Pope Paul VI remind us of Father Berthier comments concerning the work, especially manual work.

At the end it is mentioned the profound words of Father Berthier to us, his disciples, regarding our great model "The Holy Family", written in his book *Le Culte et l’Imitation de la Sainte Famille* (Paris-Grave 1906, 314 s ):

*You are placed under the patronage of this divine Family in which grew the divine Missionary sent by God to the world for the sovereign; grow all like Jesus, in wisdom, in age and in grace before God and before men, by copying the celestial model which has been offered to you and in your very name invites you to reproduce faithfully ... Be convinced; for it is a certain truth: your ministry will be all the more fruitful as you get closer to poverty, purity, obedience of the Holy Family… The examples of the Holy Family are the treasure that we bequeath to you, but a buried treasure (cf. Mt 13,44-46); it is necessary, through meditation, to excavate the interior of Jesus, Mary, Joseph, in order to discover all the riches it contains. Meditate on it and you will find in their perfection, not only the virtues that we have only indicated, but also all the virtues that will make you true religious, holy priests, capable of forming others and, when God wills, missionaries with an apostolic heart.*