

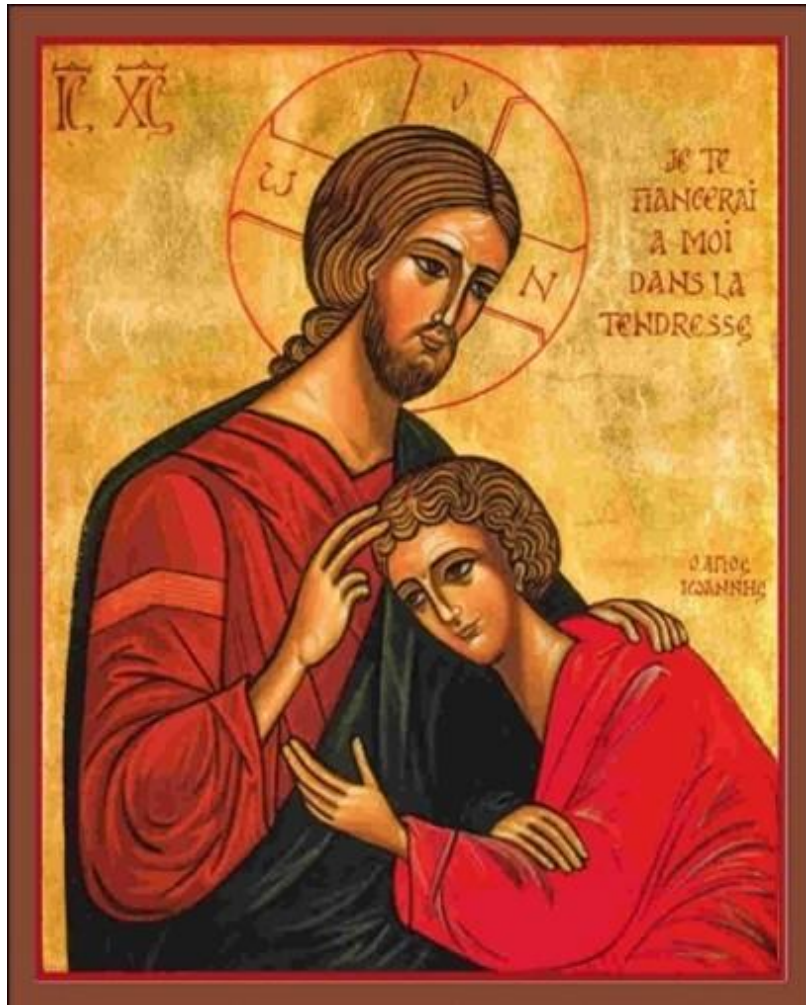


Society of
the Sacred Heart
of Jesus

OPENING CONFERENCE
PROBATION 2026-2027

September 3, 2026

Claire Castaing
Superior General



Dear sisters,

Dear Christine, Dorcas, Gaëtane, Naomi, Tímea, Veronica and Vinsensia,

Dear Gera and Quena,

Today, we celebrate with great joy the opening of this Probation.

Your sisters on the General Council — Ananda Amritmahal, Noellina Namusisi, Paqui Rodríguez, Sheila Smith and myself — are delighted to welcome you here in Rome for this blessed time of immediate preparation for your final commitment.

We are particularly delighted to welcome you, who come from different countries, different provinces, and different cultures and backgrounds: from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, France, Hungary, Indonesia, as well as India and Chile.



There are only a few of you: seven sisters preparing to make their final vows, accompanied by Gerardette Philips and Quena Valdes. And yet, in welcoming you, we are in a sense welcoming the whole Society of the Sacred Heart: its diversity, its faces, its languages, its histories, its hopes...

And it is also the whole Society that is accompanying you at this time.

Probation is a special time. A time given to you. A time entrusted to you by the Society. A time of preparation, certainly, but above all a time to allow yourselves to encounter the Lord more deeply, to allow yourselves to be rooted more deeply in Him, in your vocation and in the religious family to which you are going to give your lives definitively.

I would like to begin with this very simple question: **what do you bring with you today?**

You do not arrive here empty-handed.

Each of you arrives with a story. With everything that has brought you to this day. With the encounters that have shaped you, the calls you have heard, the joys that have strengthened you, and perhaps also the difficulties, the wounds, the questions and the struggles that are part of your journey.

You also arrive with your desires. The desire to give your life. The desire to follow Christ more closely. The desire to know the Society of the Sacred Heart more deeply. Perhaps also with a certain anxiety about what lies ahead, about that definitive commitment which is drawing near and which gives this Probation a particular intensity.

I would like to invite you not to hide any of this from the Lord.

Come as you are.

Come with what you carry within you today: your strengths and your frailties, your generosity and your resistance, your certainties and your questions, your dreams and perhaps your fears.

You are not here to become 'perfect' religious sisters in a matter of months. You are here to make yourselves available to God's action.

Probation is a time to let Him take the lead.

And if this time has been given to you, it is not just for your own sake. Your provincials have sent you. The Society is sending you to live through this time. This is your mission.

You have come to Rome to prepare for your final commitment, but already this commitment is directed towards the Mission. The world to which we are sent needs consecrated women who know Jesus Christ, who love Him deeply and who are willing to give their lives with Him and as He did.



We are aware of the wounds of our world: violence, war, injustice, divisions, poverty in so many forms, a lack of education, and the fears and uncertainties that affect so many people, particularly young people.

In this world, the vocation of the Sacred Heart is more relevant than ever. For our world needs to know something of God's love. It needs to encounter people who have allowed the Heart of Christ to love them and transform their own hearts so that they may love as He does.

That is why this time is so precious.

You are here to return to the source. To put down roots. To delve deeper into what lies at the heart of your vocation. To discover, time and again, that our religious life does not begin with what we do, but with the One we follow.

Coming to the Heart of Christ

The image that accompanies us today can help us enter into this time: that of John, the disciple, with his head resting on the Heart of Christ.

It is a very beautiful image for your Probation.

To be there, close to Him. To listen to His Heart. To learn to recognize His feelings, His desires, His preferences.

Our Constitutions invite us "to apply ourselves to study His interior dispositions in order to unite and conform ourselves to them"¹. And they also tell us that He wishes "to make known to us the feelings and preferences of His Heart"².

What a wonderful way to begin preparing for your final commitment!

It is not primarily a matter of accumulating knowledge about Jesus. It is not merely a question of gaining a better understanding of the history of the Society or of delving deeper, intellectually, into certain aspects of our vocation, even though all of this has its place.

It is about seeking this inner knowledge of Jesus.

To know Jesus from the inside. To know what gives Him life. What moves Him. What brings Him joy. What stirs His compassion. What provokes His outrage in the face of evil and injustice.

His tenderness. His freedom. The way He looks at people. His care for the little ones and the poor. His love for His friends. His silence. His faithfulness in the face of trial...

And, right to the very end, His trusting surrender to the Father.

¹ Constitutions §17

² Constitutions §18



The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius invite us precisely to this intimate contemplation of the life of Christ. As we look at Jesus, we gradually seek to enter into His feelings. As our Constitutions tell us: As we contemplate Jesus, “we learn from His attitudes and responses...”³

Yes, during this time, look at Jesus.

Look at Him often. Learn from Him humanity and tenderness. Learn from Him passion and silence. Learn from Him joy and peace.

Ask ceaselessly for the grace to know Him intimately, so that you may love Him more and follow Him more closely.

Enter into this season with an open heart.

I would simply like to offer you a few suggestions.

Firstly: keep your heart open, poor and generous at the same time.

An open heart, capable of receiving. A humble heart, which does not presume to know it all, which is willing to be moved, surprised and challenged. A generous heart, which dares to give itself to this time without calculation.

You have come from far away. You have left your communities, your provinces, your responsibilities. Do not remain at the threshold of this experience. Enter into it fully.

And to do this, give a true place to the Word of God, to the Gospel. Nothing less. For it is there that we discover the Heart of Jesus: “through His words and attitudes, His relationship with people, His way of being in touch with nature and all things...”⁴.

Also, make ample room for prayer and silence.

I believe that the Probation period can be a special time to rediscover a certain inner freedom. A freedom from all that constantly demands our attention. Perhaps it will take courage to set aside, for a while, our phones, our devices (especially digital ones), and social media... in order to look after your mind, your body and heart, your inner space and your relationships.

Not to flee from the world. But to be able to listen to it more fully.

Above all, to be able to listen to the movements of the Spirit. To learn to recognize its presence within yourselves, in others, in events, in what gives you life as well as in what resists you.

And then there will be the readings, the visits, the encounters, the conversations... There will be what you learn from one another.

³ Constitutions §15

⁴ Constitutions §19



I encourage you to live this communal, international and intercultural experience to the full. You come from different countries and cultures. Do not try to erase your differences. Embrace them as a gift.

Listen to one another. Learn from one another. Share what gives you life. Dare also to speak of what is difficult.

Together, create a community atmosphere that truly fosters the experience of God and sharing.

This small Probation community can become a very precious place for learning about our religious life: learning to welcome a sister who is different from me, to listen, to wait, to forgive, to receive, to give... to love through actions, in the ordinary routines of daily life.

To give your life

And all this leads us to the essential question: why?

Why enter into the Heart of Christ in this way? Why seek to understand His feelings and His preferences?

Because we wish to respond to His first Love. Because we wish to give our lives. Our Constitutions speak to us of this grace of “contemplating reality and perceiving it with His Heart”, so that we may “commit ourselves to the service of the Kingdom and grow in love”⁵.

I believe that this is where the horizon of your Probation lies.

You are approaching the moment when you will say definitively: yes, I give my life.

But this ‘yes’ is not, first and foremost, a promise that you will fulfil by your own strength alone. It is a response to a love that has gone before you. It is a response to the One who has looked upon you, called you, drawn you, and led you this far.

So, allow yourselves to be loved. Allow Christ to look upon you. Allow yourselves to be transformed by His Spirit. And ask Him to make your hearts, little by little, like His own.

The Society of the Sacred Heart is currently at a significant juncture in its history. You will have the opportunity to get to know it more closely – its strengths as well as its vulnerabilities, its unity and its diversity.

You will encounter an international, intercultural Society, on a journey, seeking to live in an ever more synodal way and to discern the signs of the times.

And you are arriving at a time of renewal: eight new provinces are setting out to better carry out the Society’s Life and Mission.

⁵ Constitutions §21



You are not merely young sisters reaching the end of your initial formation. You already have your share of responsibility for the future of the Society.

The way you give your lives, the way you love, live in community, act as educators, allow yourselves to be sent out, embrace change, and step into the unknown – all of this will help to write the next chapter of our history.

Dear sisters, I hope you will enter this Probation with confidence.

Do not try to control everything. Do not seek to know in advance what you will need to take away from this experience.

Let yourselves be guided. Let yourselves be encountered. Let yourselves be moved. Let yourselves be transformed.

Like John, draw near to the Heart of Christ and take the time to dwell there.

Listen to its beating. Learn its feelings and its preferences.

And little by little, may this Heart become your way of looking at the world, at people, at events; your way of loving and of giving your life.

Then, at the end of this journey, when the time comes for your final commitment, you will be able to give your life with a new freedom – not because you will have all the answers, but because you will know more clearly to whom you are giving your life, for whom and with whom.

Before I conclude, I would like to extend a special thank you to your Probation team.

Dear Gera and Quena, you have been called and sent to walk alongside our sisters over the coming months. I know that the challenges raised by my Council and the momentum from the formators' meeting last July led you to fine-tune the program right up until these last few days! Your presence, your support, your willingness to listen, and your own availability will be an important part of this experience. We thank you for accepting this mission and we entrust you, too, to the Holy Spirit.

And so, dear sisters, here you are in Rome.

You will discover this city, its history, the universal Church, and the places that have left their mark on our Society. You are here at Villa Lante, in this house where Madeleine-Sophie herself received much and prayed much. She, too, is waiting for you.

Casa Betania, which is dedicated especially to you, the garden, the community, and the lay collaborators who bring this place to life, offer you an exceptional setting for this experience.

Receive all this as a gift.



I would like to conclude by returning to John.

We contemplated him at the start of this conference, with his head resting on the Heart of Jesus.

John, the Beloved Disciple. The one who remains close to Jesus. The one who listens. The one who rests upon His Heart. But John is also the one who stands at the foot of the Cross. And there, at the very moment when Jesus gives His life to the very end, he receives a new gift.

Jesus entrusts His Mother to him: 'Behold your mother.'

And to Mary, Jesus entrusts His disciple: 'Behold your son.'

An intimate knowledge of the Heart of Jesus does not lead us to shut ourselves away in an intimate relationship with Him. It leads us to the Cross, to the total gift of ourselves, and it opens us up to a new family, to a new way of loving and welcoming others.

Just like John, you too are entrusted to Mary.

And Mary is entrusted to you.

So, during this Probation, I invite you too to welcome Mary as a mother and as a companion on your journey. And, like John, learn to welcome her into your home.

Entrust to her whatever you are carrying.

Ask her to teach you to welcome, as she did, God's action in your life.

Ask her to teach you to say 'yes', day after day.

Ask her for the joy of the Magnificat for the blessings you have received.

Dear sisters, we are very happy to welcome you. We will walk with you. And rest assured that the whole Society is with you.

We pray for each of you the grace to let yourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit.

May He open your hearts.

May He set you free and make you open to His will.

May He root you deeply in the love of Christ.

And may He grant you the joy and generosity to respond, more and more each day, to His Love, so that you may give your lives and, together with the whole Society, participate in the service of the Kingdom.

