



MESSAGGE FROM
POPE FRANCIS
FOR THE CALASANCTIAN
JUBILEE YEAR



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To The Very Reverend Father
PEDRO AGUADO CUESTA

General Superior of the Piarist Fathers

With great joy I address you and all the Piarist brothers on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the birth of the Pious Schools as a Religious Congregation and of the 250th anniversary of the canonization of St. Joseph Calasanz. On this happy occasion I also want to be present not only to celebrate the extraordinary history that you have written from the times of the Founder until today, but also to encourage you to continue it with enthusiasm, dedication and hope “*for the glory of God and the usefulness of our neighbor*” with the assurance that, although the circumstances in which the Order was born are not those of today, the

needs it responds to remain essentially the same: children and young people need the distribution of the bread of piety and letters, the poor continue to call us and summon us, the society demands to be transformed according to the values of the Gospel, and the preaching of Jesus must be brought to all peoples and all nations.

Pope Paul V, 400 years ago, realized that it was the Holy Spirit who led Joseph of Calasanz to dedicate himself to the education of the children who at that time wandered in the streets of Rome, and for that reason he erected the “Pauline Congregation of the Poor of the Mother God of the Pious Schools” with the bull *Ad ea per quae*, as the first Congregation in the Church dedicated exclusively to the education of children and young people, especially the poorest. In the last century, Pius XII recognized the importance of his Founder, proclaiming him, on the occasion of the third centenary of his death and the second of his beatification, Heavenly Patron of all Christian public schools (Cf. Brief *Providentissimus Deus*: AAS 1948, 11, 454-455).

In these four centuries the Pious Schools have remained in a permanent attitude of openness to reality and of “going forth”: from Rome to the small Italian towns where their educational service was urgently requested; From Italy to European countries, where the Church wanted to solidly educate children in the Catholic faith; and later to other continents, to serve the Church and the world in the field of education. They have always exercised their ministry in school, but have been able to incarnate their charisma also in several other areas. And, at the same time, they have been able to respond to the requests of the Church, assuming pastoral services wherever necessary. Finally, in response to the wishes of Vatican II, which called for a more active participation of the laity in the life of the Church, they have opened the way for the Piarist Fraternities, inviting men and women of good will to share their charism and their mission, fostering a rich variety of vocations.

Since Calasanz began his educational activities, in 1597, until the Church erected the Congregation, twenty years passed, twenty intense years in which his identity was being shaped. On the anniversary we celebrate and you will live as *Calasanctian Jubilee Year*, I hope you will remember what you are and what you are called to be. I ask the Lord to grant you to live those dispositions that made your Founder a saint. In this way, the Pious Schools will be what San Calasanz wanted and what children and young people need.

I invite you to live this Jubilee Year as a new “Pentecost of the Piarists”. May the common house of the Pious Schools be filled with the Holy Spirit, so that the communion necessary to carry forward the mission of the Piarists in the world, surpassing the fears and barriers of all kinds, will be created. That your people, communities and works can radiate in all languages, places and cultures the liberating and saving force of the Gospel. May the Lord help you to always have a missionary spirit and readiness to get on the road.

The motto you have chosen for this Jubilee Year – To educate, Announce, To transform - guides and gives you directions. Remain open and attentive to the promptings of the Spirit. Above all, follow the traces that children and young people carry written in their eyes. Look at their faces and let them contaminate you by their brightness to be bearers of future and hope. May God grant you to be prophetically present in the corners where children suffer unjustly.

Today more than ever we need an evangelizing pedagogy capable of changing the heart and reality in harmony with the Kingdom of God, making people protagonists and participants in the process. Christian education, especially among the poorest and where the Good News has little place or touches life marginally, is a privileged means to achieve this goal. In an educational charisma such as yours, enormous potentialities are perceived, many of which are yet to be discovered. Education opens the possibility of understanding and welcoming the presence of God in the heart of every human being, from the earliest childhood, making use of human (“letters”) and divine (“piety”) knowledge. Only the coherence of a life based on this love will make you fruitful and fill you with children.

I want to remember the strong words with which your founder described the ministry to which he dedicated his life: “Very dignified, very noble, very praiseworthy, very beneficial, very useful, very necessary, deeply rooted in our nature, very appreciated, very pleasant and very glorious” (*Memorial to Cardinal Tonti*). These words are still valid! In fact, today there are millions of children without access to education, excluded in big cities, limited in their aspirations and plans for the future due to human selfishness and greed; thousands of children away from their homes and their schools due to wars, and requiring special educational attention. And all school children are continually in need

of true teachers, to help them grow from deep roots, to show them Christ and to accompany them on the journey of life.

I do not want to stop saying one thing that I feel with particular force when I think about consecrated life. Being part of a religious family for Saint Joseph Calasanz meant choosing a path of continuous and marked abasement. Being Piarist is being, by definition, a person in a low state, a small one that can be identified with the small, a poor with the poor. The history of our salvation is the story of a supreme abasement: the divine becomes human, the celestial becomes terrestrial, the eternal becomes temporary, the absolute becomes fragile, the wisdom of God becomes madness and his strength becomes weakness; because Life, the true Life, is humbled to death, and death on the cross. To follow Jesus is to follow his abasement, to come, as He, to the bottom of humanity, of our weakness, and there to become a servant, as the One who did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for all Cf. Mt 20, 28).

St. Joseph of Calasanz said: “The shortest and easiest way to be exalted to self-knowledge and from this to the attributes of mercy, prudence and infinite patience of God, is to descend to give light to children and particularly to those who are the most helpless, because being this a trade so low and vile in the eyes of the world, few want to humiliate to it. (*Epistolary*, 1236). Your Founder discovered that the true path of self-knowledge and the exercise of the highest virtues was the abasement in front of children, especially to the most abandoned, to bring them to light. In the same way that the Lord wanted to put true happiness and joy in the baseness of the cross, you, as consecrated persons, should find your fullness and joy in the daily abasement among children and young people, especially the poorest and needy. You have not been founded for another greatness than that of smallness, or to any other summit than that of the abasement, which dresses you with the feelings of Christ and leads you to be cooperators of the Divine Truth and to become children with children and poor with the poor (cf. *Constitutions*, 19).

I entrust all of you, the Order, the Calasanzian Family and the Piarist Fraternities to the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose name the Order of the Pious Schools bears. Mary, who was the first teacher of Jesus, is your model and protection to continue carrying out your mission, accompanying the little ones towards the Kingdom of God.

With these sentiments, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to all of you.

From the Vatican, November 27, 2016

Franciscus

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